

GREEN GINGER



ARTHUR MORRISON



GREEN GINGER

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON

*Author of "Tales of Mean Streets," "A Child of the
Jago," "To London Town," "The Hole in
the Wall," "Divers Vanities," etc.*

So hey with a whim-wham from the lande of green ginger
A Peck of Madnesse



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ARTHUR MORRISON

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GUY

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A SKINFUL OF TROUBLE

OF all the afflictions brought on a suffering civilization by the Limited Liability Acts as they stand in the statutes of this commercial country, few can exceed the troubles, pains, and harassments of Mr. Nathaniel Dowdall, consequent on his investment of an odd hundred pounds in Filer's Royal and Imperial Circus, Limited. It was no matter of a public issue of shares at the hands of a professional promoter, no case of a glowing prospectus with a titled directorate. Filer, of Filer's Royal and Imperial Circus, indeed, made fresh issues of shares whenever he found the opportunity, and wherever he fell across the confiding investor. He was managing director, and, it is to be presumed, the rest of the board also. He was Filer, and there was the long and short, the thick and thin, the beginning and end of it. From time to time the capital of Filer, Limited, was increased by just as much as some hopeful stranger might be persuaded to entrust to Filer, managing director, in exchange for an elegantly printed certificate constituting him a partner (limited) in the

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joys and sorrows of Filer. Then Filer's Royal and Imperial Circus passed on, and, if the new shareholder remained quiescent, there was nobody in the world so ready to let bygones be bygones as the magnanimous Filer.

Mr. Nathaniel Dowdall did not remain quiescent. He followed Filer with letters, monthly, fortnightly, and then weekly. Some came back through the Dead Letter Office, a few vanished wholly into the unknown, but some caught Filer at towns where the circus pitched, and others overtook him, redirected; and that in sufficient numbers to grow, after a year or so, something of a nuisance to the otherwise unruffled Filer. So much so, that he went as far as to answer one or two of the later and more violent, in a tone of flowery affability. And then Mr. Dowdall wrote thus:

Without Prejudice.

613 BRAMBLEBURY ROAD,
STREATHAM HILL, S. W.,
May 15th.

SIR,—I will have no more of your evasions and promises. You have obtained my money by fraudulent misrepresentation, and I demand its instant return. Unless I receive by Thursday next your cheque for the sum of one hundred pounds, I shall place the whole affair in the hands of my solicitors to deal with as they con-

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sider best, with a view not only to the recovery of the money, but to the proper punishment of a disgraceful fraud. This letter is final.

Your obedient servant,

NATHANIEL DOWDALL ,

It would be difficult, thought Mr. Dowdall (and Mrs. Dowdall agreed with him), to devise a more peremptory missive than this; though indeed, since each of the last two letters had ended with the declaration that it was final, the concluding clause might be considered by now to have lost some of its force. But on the other hand, "Without Prejudice" was quite new, and very terrible to behold. Filer's answer, however, came in this form:

FILER'S ROYAL AND IMPERIAL CIRCUS,
LIMITED,

May 16th.

MY DEAR MR. NATHANIEL DOWDALL,—My natural delight at hearing once again from so highly esteemed a friend and partner as yourself was somewhat chastened by a suspicion that the tone of your letter was one of irritation. I need hardly assure you that it would afford me the highest and purest pleasure to comply with your thoughtful suggestion that I should send you my cheque for one hundred pounds, but I have reason to believe that the presentation of that

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cheque at the bank would result in a pang of disappointment which far be it from me to inflict upon you. The stream of wealth, in fact, which is destined inevitably to overtake our enterprise in time, and which I shall welcome chiefly because it will enable me to direct a large volume of it toward you, is meeting with a temporary obstruction. In the meantime permit me to thank you for the kind thought which prompted your charmingly original heading, and to rejoice to learn that you are still without prejudice against

Your devoted, though
temporarily embarrassed partner,
PLANTAGENET FILER

Mr. Dowdall perused this letter with eyes that emerged steadily till they threatened to overhang his most prominent waistcoat-button. Speechless he passed it across the breakfast-table to Mrs. Dowdall, who, having read it in her turn, barely mustered the words, "Well, I never did!"

This was Mr. Dowdall's rejoinder, written after an hour's interval of simmering wrath:

STREATHAM HILL, S. W.,
May 17th.

MR. FILER,—I am not to be turned aside by impudent flippancy. I may remind you that, even though you may have made away with my

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money, you have goods which may be seized in satisfaction of my claim, and unless I receive the sum of which you have defrauded me before the end of the week I shall take steps to secure it by the means provided by law. This letter is final.

NATHANIEL DOWDALL

'As Mr. Dowdall anticipated, this produced a change in Filer's attitude. His answer, still amiable in tone, indicated surrender :

FILER'S ROYAL AND IMPERIAL CIRCUS,
LIMITED,

May 18th.

MY DEAR MR. DOWDALL,—It grieves me to perceive, from your last letter, that my fear of a certain irritation on your part of late was well-founded, and I hasten to remove all occasion for an asperity which I feel sure you have already regretted. My sorrow is chiefly that you should cut yourself off from participation in the noble revenues which are shortly to accrue to this enterprise; but, rather than my honor should be in any way called in question, I will even encounter the bitterness of this disappointment. It would increase my distress, if, in addition to your sacrifice of the golden opportunity, you were to incur legal expense; and therefore I am now freely handing over to you a valuable part of the property of this company, more than

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equivalent to the sum you have invested. It should arrive in the course of a day or so, by rail, in a large case, carriage forward. I am now leaving England, with the enterprise, for an extended Continental tour, and take the opportunity of tendering you my heartiest farewells, and expressing my pleasure that our business connection terminates in friendly concord.

Your late partner, but eternal well-wisher,
PLANTAGENET FILER

P.S.—The case should be handled with care. It is not a new one, and in some places it is not altogether what one might wish.—P. F.

This was far more satisfactory, and Mr. Dowdall beamed as he passed the letter to his wife, who beamed again as she handed it back. Plainly he had gone the right way to work to bring such a fellow as Filer to his senses. Clearly Filer had realized at last that Nathaniel Dowdall was not to be trifled with, and had offered the best composition in his power without waiting for a legal seizure. Perhaps, also, there was a little in Mrs. Dowdall's suggestion that some traces of honesty lingered in Filer's system yet; for, in truth, he might have left the country without notice, and so have removed his goods beyond the reach of bailiffs.

There were possible awkwardnesses to be con-

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sidered, of course. Showmen's accessories were of little use to Mr. Dowdall, and might prove difficult to dispose of. But that was a matter best left till the goods came to hand. For the rest of that day and for some part of the next Mr. Dowdall was patient and hopeful. And then the case arrived.

Mr. Dowdall was sitting in the inconvenient little back room which the household was taught to call his study, and Mrs. Dowdall was consulting him on the eternal domestic question, beef or mutton; when the blank and bewildered face of Selina the housemaid appeared at the door, and the hand of Selina extended towards Mr. Dowdall a large biscuit-colored delivery sheet.

"It's the railway van, sir," announced Selina; "and they've brought a tiger."

"A tiger!" gasped Mr. Dowdall, quite forgetting to shut his mouth after the utterance.

And "A tiger!" echoed Mrs. Dowdall, faintly, opening her mouth wider still.

"Yes, m'm," replied the housemaid. "It's in a big wooden cage, a-nowlin' an' stampin' an' goin' on dreadful. And there's six pound four and eightpence to pay."

In the blank pause that followed, vague rumblings, shouts, and yelps from the direction of the street reached the ears of Mr. Dowdall, like the ancestral voices that prophesied war to Kubla Khan. He rose, murmuring helplessly;

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his murmurs increased as he reached the study door, and the burden of their plaint was, "Six pound four and eightpence!"

Then he turned suddenly on Selina. "I won't have it!" he exclaimed. "Send it away."

And Mrs. Dowdall, awakened to a sudden sense of danger, caught his arm, pushed Selina into the passage, and shut the door after her in one complicated spasm of presence of mind.

The noises from the street grew in volume, and it was clear that a public attraction had been scented, and the inevitable torrent of shouting boys had set in. Presently Selina returned with the report that, whether Mr. Dowdall paid the railway charges or waited to be sued for them, the tiger addressed to him would be delivered there and then. The men, it seemed, had given her to understand that the tiger's society was no longer desired, either by themselves or by any other person connected with the railway.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Dowdall, recovering something of his natural sense of civic propriety. "People can't be expected to take in any tigers anybody likes to address to them! It would undermine the whole fabric of society. I—I won't be bullied. Is the front door shut?"

The front door was shut, and with so much of assured security Mr. Dowdall betook himself to the drawing-room, the window whereof commanded the nearest view of the street and the

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area railings. Boys were competing for seats on those same railings, and the standing-room in the street was growing rapidly less. From the tail of a large van stout planks sloped, and down these planks slid a huge wooden, iron-bound case, lowered by many ropes in the hands of several excited men. From within the case came angry growls, and as it reached the pavement, Mr. Dowdall observed that its front was a sort of door of stout iron-clamped planks, with narrow intervals between them, through which intervals came glimpses of restless fiery yellow fur.

The case came to rest before the railings, and the carman, perceiving Mr. Dowdall at the window, waved the biscuit-colored delivery sheet and hailed him. Mr. Dowdall raised the sash and parleyed.

"Are you goin' to pay 'this 'ere money now, sir?" demanded the carman.

"Certainly not," retorted Mr. Dowdall. "I don't want a tiger—I didn't order one—the whole thing's a—a clerical error. Mark it 'Dead Parcels Office' and take it back!"

"Dead parcels!" repeated the carman, with withering scorn. "It about the livest parcel *I* ever see, an' it's pretty near marked some of us gettin' it 'ere. Dead parcels! It's my orders to leave it 'ere, pay or not, sign or not; an' the comp'ny'll see you about the charges arterwards. Dead parcels! 'Ere, git up!"

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And with that the carman sought his perch, and the van clattered away with its retinue of ropes, planks, and wholly untipped porters.

The crowd was bigger and noisier every minute, and the bolder among the boys were already tentatively pushing sticks between the planks, to the manifest disapproval of the tiger; and as he watched, Mr. Dowdall recalled the warning that the case was "not altogether what one might wish." He broke into a sweat of apprehension, wildly wondering what would be the legal charge for an ordinary street boy devoured by a tiger. And as he wondered there appeared, towering above the heads by the street corner, a policeman's helmet.

The policeman elbowed steadily through the crowd, sternly ordering it to "pass along there," without any particular result. He walked cautiously round the case and observed the direction on the label. Then he ascended Mr. Dowdall's front steps and was about to ring the bell; when Mr. Dowdall, with diplomatic resource, addressed him first from the window.

"Good morning, constable," he said. "There's a tiger down there I want cleared away from my doorstep."

This would not seem to have been a request for which the policeman was prepared. He

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paused, looked back at the case, and then again at Mr. Dowdall.

"It's your tiger, sir," he said at length.

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Dowdall, airily; "not at all. Somebody seems to have dropped it—out of a cart, I fancy." He inwardly congratulated himself on the conscientious accuracy of this conjecture. "Yes," he added, "I am pretty sure it was dropped out of a cart."

"It's got your name and address on it, anyhow," retorted the policeman.

"Ah, yes, yes; that's merely a—a coincidence. A tiger might have anybody's name on it, you know; not at all uncommon. Done to throw you off the scent. I should think there'd be quite a handsome reward for finding a thing like that, if you took it to the station."

The policeman, sternly contemptuous, disregarded the suggestion. "That tiger's causin' an obstruction," he said severely.

"Yes," assented Mr. Dowdall. "Shocking! I give it in charge."

The constable, with rising wrath, surveyed the crowd that now filled the street, and turned once more to Mr. Dowdall. "That tiger's your property," he said, "and if you don't take it indoors it'll be my dooty to summons you." And with that he produced a notebook and wrote laboriously.

And now as he wrote, a sergeant arrived, who

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positively ordered Mr. Dowdall to take his tiger indoors instantly. Mr. Dowdall desperately contemplated the prospect of standing a siege of public, police, and tiger combined; when there arrived on the heels of the others an inspector, a far better diplomatist than either of his inferior officers. He first carefully examined the case and its inscriptions, and then politely inquired if Mr. Dowdall were in any way connected with Filer's Circus. Mr. Dowdall was cornered. To deny Filer's Circus to a responsible police-officer meant to renounce the hope of redress from Filer. Mr. Dowdall first hesitated and then admitted his partnership; and straightway was deprived of all defence.

"Ah, just so," said the diplomatic inspector. "I see you've a nice wide stable entrance in the side road—we'll see about getting him in there. Three or four men with rollers and crowbars can do it in no time. I should think you could get the men and the tackle too from Brady's in five minutes; I'll send a man to see about it for you."

Now, perhaps partly because of the soothing manner of the inspector, Mr. Dowdall was beginning to feel a little less alarmed at the state of affairs. The tiger had not killed anybody yet, and seemed to have grown a good deal quieter now that his not very roomy habitation had come to rest; and that same habitation had as yet

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shown no signs of giving way anywhere. The front planks were so strong, the padlock was so very large, and the air-spaces were so very narrow that the creature could scarcely see, let alone get out. And indeed a tiger was no doubt rather a valuable possession, if you could find a buyer. There would be no great risk in allowing the case and its prisoner to stand in the back garden, with all doors locked, for a little while—an hour or so—till he could get an offer for it. For by now Mr. Dowdall's natural business instincts were beginning to assert themselves, and he had formed a plan.

He calmed the natural agitation of Mrs. Dowdall, and dispatched an urgent telegram to Padgebury, the eminent wild beast dealer of Shadwell, thus:

TO PADGEBURY, *or anybody in charge*, Shadwell.—Come instantly. Magnificent business opening. Unusual opportunity.—DOWDALL, 613, Bramblebury Road, S.W.

This done, Mr. Dowdall resigned himself, with comparative equanimity, to observing the exertions of a dozen dishevelled men, who, with strong arms and much stronger language, shoved and hauled and scuffled the iron-bound case along the pavement and round the corner, and so through the gates at the side, amid the enthu-

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siasm of the populace, and to the newly aroused growls and flops of the tiger. Somebody suggested a joint of beef to keep the beast quiet, and all the men suggested beer for other purposes, when at last the case rested in the farthest corner of the stable-yard. The joint of beef was found to be too large to pass between the planks, when presented at the end of a pole, and so had to be hacked into small pieces; but the only distinct complaint about the beer was that it was not large enough. On the whole, considering these things and the railway company's claims, Mr. Dowdall found himself making a considerable further investment in Filer.

Also he discovered that he had the honor of receiving the famous Wrestling Tiger, as announced by a bill which the thoughtful Filer had pasted on one side of the case; whereon it was made known that at Filer's Royal and Imperial Circus the gifted quadruped would wrestle a fall every night in its cage, with its trainer, or with any gentleman in the house who would oblige; having already killed fifteen champion wrestlers in sundry European capitals, with great applause from the discriminating public. Mr. Dowdall was somewhat gratified to find himself in possession of so valuable an animal, and blamed himself for his early anxiety to repudiate its ownership.

Early in the afternoon a man arrived from

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Padgebury's. He was a mild, colorless person, in shabby corduroys, and he had come, he explained, because Mr. Padgebury and his head man were out on business, and the telegram seemed to be important.

"Yes," replied Mr. Dowdall, impressively, "it was—for Mr. Padgebury; most important. The fact is, when I sent that telegram I had reluctantly decided to part with my tiger—the most magnificent and talented creature ever placed upon the market. I'm not so sure about it now, but a sufficiently good offer might tempt me. It's in the stable-yard; go and look at it while I wait here."

The man shook his head feebly. "Tigers ain't my department, sir," he said; "it's the canaries what I look after. If it 'ad a-been a pipin' bullfinch now——"

"Oh, but surely," protested Mr. Dowdall, "as a responsible man from Padgebury's—a leading man on the staff, you know—you can deal with just a simple matter of an ordinary tiger. Come now; just go and run your eye over him."

But the man shook his head again. "I ain't no judge of a tiger," he replied. "I don't know 'is p'int. Anything in the way of a redpoll I could take on easy. An' if you ain't sure you really want to sell 'im, p'r'aps you'd better think it over for a day or two."

"Oh, no—not at all," Mr. Dowdall inter-

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posed, hastily. "I'd rather get the parting over at once and have done with it. I'd like you to go and tell Mr. Padgebury about it as soon as he gets back. It's a most extraordinary tiger—wrestles, and does card tricks, and all that. When will Mr. Padgebury be back?"

The canary-tamer was not quite certain, but it was pretty sure to be some time in the afternoon.

"Very well, get him to come along at once with a van. But there's one thing you might tell me," Mr. Dowdall proceeded, confidentially. "You'd scarcely believe it, but some of my servants are foolishly nervous about that tiger. Now, you are a man of experience. Couldn't you give it something to keep it quiet till Mr. Padgebury comes?"

"Beef?" suggested the canary-man, interrogatively.

"It's got beef," Mr. Dowdall replied. "But I don't mean food. Something to send it to sleep, for instance?"

"Whisky," replied the shabby man promptly. "They tame hedgehogs with that."

"But how can I give a tiger whisky?"

The canary-man rubbed his ear thoughtfully for a moment. Then he said: "Force 'is mouth open and pour it down 'is throat."

But a very little more conversation made it clear that neither Mr. Dowdall nor the man from Padgebury's was prepared to adopt this

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method personally; and after a little more negotiation it was agreed that Padgebury's retainer should visit the stable-yard with a view to devising a less adventurous means of administering the whisky.

Presently he returned and reported his plan. "There's precious little room between the planks," he said. "In fact, you can't properly see in without shoving your eye rayther too close to the door. But there's a bit of an iron trough fixed inside, with water, an' if I'd got a good large basinful o' whisky, an' the garden squirt, I think I could get some of it into the trough."

A quart of whisky was produced accordingly, and the garden squirt; and in five minutes more the canary-man returned to report complete success, and to receive a fee of half a crown. Furthermore, he received fervid injunctions to send the whole Padgebury tiger-staff at the earliest possible moment; and so departed.

Perfect silence fell upon the stable-yard. Not a growl could be heard by a listener from any window at the back of the house, and the boot-boy, reconnoitring the stable-yard, reported that the tiger was motionless at the bottom of the cage—probably asleep. The household excitement was relieved, and household affairs began to resume their course.

Half an hour—an hour—an hour and a half—two hours passed in peace and quiet; and then,

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with a sudden burst of frantic shrieks, the cook, the boot-boy, and Selina came up the kitchen stairs in a rush. The tiger! The tiger! The tiger was climbing through the scullery window!

Who was first and who was last of the whole household out of the front door will never be known; it is merely conjectured that Mr. Dowdall was *not* the last, because foremost in this moment of peril, he was certainly first round the street corner, where he was so fortunate as to butt heavily into a policeman.

"Good evening, constable," gasped Mr. Dowdall, maintaining his balance by hugging the policeman's arm; "good evening! There's an interesting pet of my wife's gone astray in the house, and I think if you were to keep guard at the front door while I send for Padgebury's——"

"Padgebury's?" repeated the policeman, suspiciously. "Padgebury's? What's this 'ere pet? Is it the tiger as there's been such a fuss about?"

"Well," admitted Mr. Dowdall, glancing back apprehensively, "as a matter of fact, it *is* what you might more or less call a tiger, so to speak, but there's no need to feel alarmed on that account. I give you full authority to use your truncheon."

"Oh, you do, do you?" observed the man, strangely ungratefully. Nevertheless, he looked

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cautiously round the corner, and then began to walk toward Mr. Dowdall's front door, followed by that gentleman at some little distance. For it chanced that this was an ambitious young policeman, anxious to distinguish himself; and he hoped that there might be a possibility of doing it at no vast risk, after all. Wherefore it was with some irritation that he heard the shriek of a police-whistle farther up the road, where Mrs. Dowdall had taken refuge with a friend, who always kept the instrument handy.

The whistle had the effect of hurrying the young policeman, who resolved, if he could not be the sole representative of the force on the spot, at any rate to be the first. He mounted the front steps, cautiously approached the open door, and looked in. He ventured as far as the mat, and then beyond it, listening intently. And then he cleared the doorstep in one bound, closing the door behind him with great agility, but turning instantly to peep through a clear part of the glass panel. For he had been scared by the apparition of a great yellow head rising over the lower stairs.

"It's gone upstairs!" he cried, presently, for the information of anybody within hearing; which was nobody.

For the whistle was attracting stragglers to the house where its possessor, with distended countenance, was blowing it from the first-floor

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window, and Mr. Dowdall, in the doorway of a neighbor opposite, was dispatching a stream of telegrams to Padgebury, like minute-guns.

And in the midst of all this arrived Padgebury's van, with the great Padgebury himself and half a dozen stalwart retainers, and much tackle of iron and rope. Padgebury had started out immediately on the report of his canary-tamer, and so had escaped the fire of telegrams which Mr. Dowdall was still maintaining.

The wild beast dealer shook his head when he learned the state of affairs. "You didn't say he was loose in the house when you offered to sell him," he observed, solemnly.

"Well, I was thinking of allowing a discount in consideration of that," replied Mr. Dowdall; "a moderate discount."

Padgebury shook his head again. "In our trade," he said, "you'll find there's a deal of difference between a loose tiger and one in a cage. Loose tigers don't command any price to speak of. There's no demand for 'em."

Nevertheless, he consented to reconnoitre, with a view to securing Mr. Dowdall's specimen, on the understanding that if no deal resulted he should charge for his services. And so, slowly, with many precautions, the front door was opened, and Padgebury and his staff, listening anxiously, approached the stairs a few steps at a time.

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After a pause of careful peeping Padgebury, greatly daring, crept up the stairs and listened on the landing. Then he beckoned silently to his men, who followed with as little noise as possible, and found their principal pointing significantly at a bedroom door, standing ajar, from beyond which came distinct sounds of heavy breathing.

The men gathered on the landing, awaiting orders. And then suddenly there arose from within the room the sound of a loud, horrible yawn, and following that, in a thick but cheerful voice, the chorus:—

Put me among the girrls!
Put me among the girrls!
Do me a favor, do!
I'll do the same for you,
If you'll put——

Padgebury bounced into the room, and the chorus broke off; and his men, crowding behind him, saw the tiger lying at length on the bed, fur and teeth and whiskers complete, with a decanter hugged under one paw.

"Whirroo!" cried the tiger. "Get out! 'Tis enough to give a man the palpitations to have yez jumpin' out av nowhere like that, an ugly crowd! An' me that unwell an' all! Get out wid yez!"

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Padgebury turned one glance of amazement on his staff, and then, being a prompt man, seized the tiger by the jaw, forced it open, and peered into the cavernous skull. "Why, I believe it's Lanigan!" he said.

"What, Misther Padgebury!" cried the tiger. "'Tis the blessin' av the wurrl'd to see ye, Misther Padgebury. Oh, Mr. Padgebury, 'tis moighty lonely I am! Nobody loves me in this—this—this here outrajis integument. They trate me like a leper; an' 'tis drouthy work, growlin' like a tiger two days together, an' moighty poor conversation, wid no provisions but wan bag av biscuits. Misther Padgebury, is all av 'em you, or is there a dirthy crowd av ruffins in this room?"

"There's enough of us here to see you safely to the police-station, anyhow," answered Padgebury, grimly. "What's this game?"

"Misther Padgebury, dear, if ye shpake to me like that I'll cry like a babby, an' me that broken-hearted too. Take a drop from the decanther—'tis good stuff in this house. An' where's that gallows-hoppin' thief, Filer?"

"Filer? I don't know."

"Filer's Circus started for the Continent the day afore yesterday, so I heard," observed one of Padgebury's men.

"What?" wailed the tiger. "The day before yesterday? Then I'm robbed to the skin an'

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bones av me! Sivin months have I been doin' the wrestlin' tiger an' makin' the fortune av the show, an' not two months' pay have I got out av it! An' now he's given me the shake afther all! The curse o' the wurrl'd on the ugly head av him! I'll tell ye, Mither Padgebury. The wrestling tiger was the only thing that brought the show a pinny, though 'tis meself that says ut. Night afther night I towld Filer I'd give the swindle away in the middle av the show if I didn't get my money, an' night afther night he blarneyed me into goin' through onct more. Ye see, we'd thumpin' thick bars to the cage, an' 'twasn't likely anybody not b'longing to the show was comin' investigatin' too close, let alone goin' wrestlin' with a tiger; so we faced it out aisy enough till I threatened, an' thin Filer blarneyed me. But at last I'd be blarneyed no more, an' I got a rale paper summons for him; an' thin says Filer, frightened by the paper summons; 'I'm at the bottom av my finances, Lanigan, me boy, an' what I haven't got I can't pay. But we'll raise some,' says he, 'if ye'll tear up that nasty summons an' do as I tell ye. Now, there's a troublesome ould parrrty as calls himself a shareholder,' says he, 'an' I'll put ye in a close-nailed case and sind ye to him. An' I'll be along there as soon as you will an' sooner,' says Filer, 'bekase I'll go by passenger thrain an' you by goods. An' whin the ould man's

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terrified into fits with havin' a rampin', ragin' tiger brought to his peaceful residence, why, I'll get him to pay a call on his shares on conditions av takin' you away again. Thin,' says Filer, 'I'll pay every cint av your money and a present to the top av it!' Misther Padgebury, I did ut; an' afther that niver again ask me to be a tiger, nor a package on any goods thrain! I'm bruised all over me like a toad, and the lovely feather-bed itself is hard to me bones."

"Well," remarked Padgebury, "you don't seem to have done much good for yourself since you left me, and you're in a bigger scrape now than ever. There's Mr. Dowdall and a policeman at the front door."

"Misther Dowdall's a jintleman," said the tiger. "He's the only man that iver gave me whisky out av a garden squirrt. Plensheous whisky. It was the whisky, an' nothing but ut, that gave me the courage to open the padlock and come to look for some more. Give my compliments to Misther Dowdall an' tell him he's a betther man than his partner, an' I'd rather dale with him. The firm owes me thirty-wan pound ten an' six."

And the tiger pulled its mouth open with its right paw, and thrust the neck of the decanter once again between the cruel fangs.

THE ABSENT THREE

THERE was never a more popular man in Essex than Dan Fisk, whom I have heard called the biggest liar in the county. But that was said in the old days of innocence, when there were no newly built parts, where liars now flourish exceedingly among the other improvements.

If Dan were a liar (a thing I expressly decline to admit), he had the excuse—the justification, rather—of the artist. Thick and round of body, with a face whereon a vast grin and a dazzling squint perpetually struggled for mastery, Dan was a humorist, first and last. A solemn person was Dan Fisk's natural prey, and with subtle art and unchanging feature Dan would urge his solemnity over the edge of unseemliness into the abysm of the ridiculous; and any archer of the long-bow found in Dan an ever-ready abettor and puller of the unconscious leg.

Dan is gathered to his fathers long since, and so long that his tombstone has acquired a rollicking inclination to the left, and moss and weather have so painted it that the fat cherub's face that overlooks the inscription meets the gaze with

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a permanent wink; which is the properest accident in the world, and exactly as Dan Fisk would have had it.

He was a sober man, yet at this distance of time I can never call up the memory of his jolly face without a background from the parlor of the Castle Inn; either the enormous geraniums that stood in the bow-window at the front, or the settle in the corner, or the wide fireplace and its blazing embers, stuck with black extinguisher-shaped beer-warmers. And it was a very good background, too, being also excellently suitable to Sam Prentice, Roboshobery Dove, and Abel Pennyfather, with his big walking-stick made out of a thistle-stem from Burton's farm; the tale whereof Abel Pennyfather told nightly in this place, beginning with a mighty bang of the stick itself on the table, and a challenge to everybody to guess what the timber was.

It was a challenge that nobody accepted, well known as the stick and its story were. For Abel Pennyfather instantly began to shout the tale over again in the voice of a contentious bull, so that every other sound was drowned till the tale was told.

"Ha! ha!" Abel concluded on one such night; "'How d'ye like my walkin'-stick?' says I. 'Fine bit o' timber, ben't it? Much obliged to ye for it,' I says. 'Got it out of a wheatfield o' yourn, an' left plenty more behind.

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Why don't ye grow walkin'-sticks for reg'lar crop?' Lord, that mad he were!"

And with that Abel Pennyfather took a vast drink from the fullest mug on the table, which chanced to be the mug of Banham the carrier.

Banham stared at Pennyfather and the mugs, and began: "Why, ben't that——"

"Better sarve him out next time," observed Dan Fisk, squinting into Abel Pennyfather's own mug. "This ain't wuth reachin' for."

"Why," cried Abel, with wide eyes, "I han't a-drunk o' the wrong mug, hev I? Well, well, now, 'tis wonnerful how absent I be, a-thinkin'!"

"Wonnerful deep thinkin' it be, too," pursued Dan Fisk, transferring his squint to the outraged mug, and tilting it the better to peep. "Wonnerful deep. Nothin' could make it deeper but a bigger mug."

"But 'tis my way, neighbors," Pennyfather went on loftily. "You might scarce believe as I walked past my own gate the other day, thinkin' hard about a sick cow. Ay, an' when I remembered, an' turned back, danged if I den't get a-thinkin' agen, an' walk past the gate a second time, just as far as fust. Danged if I den't!"

"If I couldn't shorten my thoughts, I'd widen the gate," commented Dan. "Ben't proper to hev ordinary furniture for such an extraordinary man."

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Sarcasm was not a thing that Abel Pennyfather understood. "'Tis like not," he replied, with plain gratification. "And anyhow, I count I can claim there ben't so absent a man as me, one time or another, no, not in arl Essex."

For it was a failing of Abel Pennyfather to claim pre-eminence, at the top of a very large voice, in anything whatsoever that might come under discussion in his presence—anything in the world, even if it were only bunions.

"Ah," Dan Fisk replied with a shake of the head and an almost imperceptible brightening of the squint, "you be absent-minded enough, I make no doubt. I don't call to memory many with mind more absent from their heads than you, sarten to say."

"No, not one, I say," Abel pursued, with growing pride. "Never one in arl Essex."

"Ah, but you can be beat. There's the three Brewitts."

"I dunno no Brewitts, but I uphold they ben't a touch to me. Why, I tell 'ee, t'other day, an' none so long ago neither, I sat an' made up my market cipherin' with my lighted pipe, a-smokin' my pencil all the time. Ah, I did that!"

"'Twere a true notable feat, that, no doubt, but it were only once. Now, oad Tom Brewitt, he never lit a candle but what he hulled it

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out o' winder and set up the match to read by."

"Allus did it?"

"Ay, allus. Oad Sim Cloyse paid a boy two shillun a week to sit outside of evenings an' pick up candles. Rare eye to business had oad Sim Cloyse."

"That there's a yarn. Not that it's anythin' particular. I've a-done many a more highly absent-minded thing myself, so I don't count it much. But I never heard o' that Tom Brewitt. Who were he?"

"Tom Brewitt? Why, he were Bob Brewitt's brother, surely."

"Well, an' who were Bob? I s'pose you'll say he were Tom's brother?"

"No," Dan replied; "that wouldn't be a straightforard answer. Bob were brother to Sam, an' Sam were brother to both on 'em. You may disbelieve in Tom by hisself, an' 'tis arl a possibility you might cast doubts on Bob; but you can't get away with Tom, Bob, and Sam together; 'taren't logic."

"'Tis a true word, an' a very reasonable argymment," observed Banham the carrier, with a judicial shake of the head. And the company murmured agreement.

Abel Pennyfather stared blankly for five seconds. Then he said: "Well, well, I'm not sayin' 'taren't. I only said I never heard tell

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on 'em. An' I don't think so overmuch of Tom Brewitt's absent-minded doin's, nayther."

"There again," Dan went on, "you mightn't think much of Tom's absent-mindedness, an' maybe you might doubt the quality of Bob's; but when you come to Sam's, an' more especial when you come to Tom's an' Bob's an' Sam's all together, then there aren't no more argufyin'. They be too many for any argufyer."

"Well, that may be," persisted Abel Pennyfather, "but I hoad a shillun, man for man, they den't beat me. Now I tell 'ee, when we putt the four-acre field down to grass, I were a-goin——"

"Did your absence o' mind ever keep your sister an oad maid all her life?" demanded Dan.

"Why, no," Abel admitted, "seein' as you know she's been married three times a'ready. But——"

"Then you're beat," interrupted Dan. "You're beat all to crumbles, as anybody can tell you as knows the story o' the three Brewitts an' their sister Jane. An' who don't know that?"

It seemed that nobody knew it, a discovery whereat Dan expressed profound surprise. "Why," he said, "the three Brewitts kep' farm up there beyond Thundersley—I'll call the very name to mind, presently, maybe—long enough ago. There was Tom, Bob, an' Sam, like as I've told you. They was bachelors

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all, by reason of absence of mind. Tom forgot to go to church on his weddin'-day, and was clawed down the face an' forsook for that reason. Bob was all arranged for, by the other party an' her relations, but when they got him there he forgot to ask her the question, so the fam'lies was enemies henceforth, an' his absence of mind saved him. Sam forgot about marryin' altogether, an' died at eighty-fower without having remembered it. Their sister Jane, she were a single woman at forty for a different reason. What prevented her weren't so much the absence of her mind as the presence of her face. 'Twere a face o' vinegar, an' no mistake."

"Was it as ugly as yours, Dan?" Prentice asked, with much show of interest.

"Wuss than that, a mile," Dan resumed, unperturbed. "'Twere as bad as any man's face in this here room, though you'd scarce believe it. 'Twould ha' kep' a regiment out o' gunshot; and there's no guessing how her brothers lived in the same house with it, 'cept they were too absent-minded to notice. Little boys used to go the other way round to school for fear o' seeing Jane Brewitt, and 'twere said nothing could be made o' the milk on that farm 'cept cheese."

"Talkin' o' cheese," interposed Abel Pennyfather, "I've made as much as——"

"We won't talk o' cheese, then!" shouted

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Dan, and the company supported him with clamor sufficient to quell Abel. "We won't talk o' cheese, but come back to Jane Brewitt. She were a good enough housekeeper, spite of her face, an' a good housekeeper were needful in a place with three sich moonin' gapesters about. She were a good housekeeper, and, what with one thing an' t'other, business were good an' good again at Brewitts'; an' Bob Brewitt, he had a safe let into his bedroom wall, and a good full cashbox was snug inside the safe. Why that should be few could understand, with three chaps as were like as not to go an' plough a meadow 'stead o' mowin' it, or sow a young wheatfield twice over with carrots. But so 'twas how-somedever, an' 'tis like Jane had her share in keepin' things square.

"But ugly as she were, and forty as she were, Jane were still the youngest o' the family, an' den't forget to publish the fact abroad nayther, without goin' into the 'zact arithmetic o' the years. An' she wore a bonnet that made the church look like a penny show. An' so at last what nobody expected came to pass, an' a man went a-courting to Brewitts'; an' not a blind man, nayther.

"He were so far from blind that folk swore he could see, quite distinct, through Brewitts' brick wall and iron safe into the cashbox, afore he made up his mind to go a-courtin' to Jane,

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'Tis sarten he were more than half her age, but none so much more, if you den't count the time he'd been in gaol. Bates were his name, an' the poor friendless chap hadn't a soul in arl Essex to say a good word for him, conseckence of his havin' lived in the county arl his life. 'Twasn't that he ever took another man's job away from him, either, for if there was one thing in the world he'd never take it was work.

"The three brothers weren't so absent-minded as to overlook a thing like this, an' they pitched Jim Bates out o' doors reg'lar, whenever the sight of him reminded 'em. But Jane, she stood up for him through thick an' thin, as was natural. The more the folks were down on Bates the better she thought him, an' as for him, the more he saw of the Brewitts' house, and the more he heard of the cashbox, the deeper in love he got. But Tom and Bob, an' Sam, they got so mighty objectionable that Jim Bates had to take to meetin' Jane by dark in the lane, which had two advantages: first, the brothers couldn't see him; an' second, he couldn't see Jane.

"Things got desprit. The brothers swore that if she were such a fool as to go to church with Jim Bates, she should take what belonged to her an' no more; which, put in round numbers, was nothin'. But she was quite game for this, an' she told Jim Bates as much, an' openly admitted she was full aged an' could do as she liked. But

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Jim Bates was that thoughtful he wouldn't part she an' the cashbox, an' at last he persuaded her that all three should make a bolt together in the dogcart. 'Tis like she might have doubted about bringing the cashbox; but Jim Bates he told her it was good as hers, seein' she'd kep' house for her brothers so long, an', rather than she should be done out of her rights, he'd take care of it himself.

"So they settled to make a bolt of it one night after market-day. Jim Bates chose that night for reasons. 'Twas only to be supposed that both cashbox and brothers would be fullest after market-day; an' if absent-mindedness be to be took advantage of, when was an Essex farmer likely to hev more of it than on market-night? So 'twere settled to do so. Jim Bates were to come into the yard at midnight an' tip the whistle. Jane were to be all ready, an' pitch out o' winder the key o' the stable-door, which she'd hev to get from Tom Brewitt's room. This was another thing easier done on market-night. Then, while Jim Bates set about harnessin' the mare to the dogcart, Jane was to go into Bob's room, get his keys, unlock the safe, and bring out the cashbox. That was another thing only safely to be done on market-night, an', market-night an' all, poor Jane Brewitt felt mighty trembly about doin' it. After that she were to gather up all three pairs o' topboots, where the

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brothers had a-left 'em outside the bedroom doors—for she kep' her brothers up to gentry ways, did Jane—an' pitch 'em away somewheres, to keep Tom, Bob, an' Sam indoors for a bit, in case they got roused, an' give the loviders true a good clear start. That was Jane's department, an' so much done, she were to mount the dogcart with her lovin' Jim *and* the cashbox, an' live happy ever arter.

"But there ain't no dependin' on plans with absent-minded men about. Poor Jane Brewitt got frightender an' frightender every minute arter her brothers had gone to bed, an' she hadn't the pluck to go into Tom's room for the stable-key before she heard Jim Bates in the yard. 'Twere a fine moonlight night, an' she peeped an' saw him.

"'Be that you, Jim?' says she, whisperin' out o' winder.

"'Ay,' says he, whisperin' back. "'Tis arl right. I don't want the stable-key.'

"He said he den't want the stable-key," Dan said, turning to the company; "an' I'd bet a piece you won't guess why. Tom Brewitt, so fresh from market as he were, had wound his watch an' hung it on the stable-door, an' took the padlock up to bed with him; an' now that watch were tickin' away safe in Jim Bates's pocket! D'ye cap that, Abel Pennyfather?"

Abel said not a word, and Dan went on.

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"Well, that looked like good luck, and a watch in extry, for poor Jane, but it weren't; you can't make no counts with absent-minders. But there were more to come. Jim Bates looked up again, and he said: 'Hev ye been to the safe?'

"'No,' says poor Jane. 'I aren't been; an' I'm ready to faint with fear at the thought. I count it be robbery!'

"'Stay a bit,' says Jim Bates to her. 'What's that black thing I see in the rosebush under Bob's winder?'

"Well, neighbors," Dan went on, turning again to the company at large, "if Abel Pennyfather told you what I'm goin' to tell you, you mightn't believe it; but, seein' I say it myself, there's no question. Bob Brewitt had finished *his* market-day so chock full of absent-mindedness that he'd opened the casement instead o' the safe-door, an' shoved the cashbox out o' winder! Can ye cap that?

"Well, now, that looked as if the course o' true love were runnin' smoothen than ever, den't it? But I tell 'ee again, ye can't make no count with absent-minders. The absence o' mind proper to market-night had helped the lovers true as regards two brothers, but it ruined an' shipwrecked the whole venture in the case o' the third. There was nothin' to do now for Jane, but to gather up the boots, an' pelt off for a

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weddin' licence; but that she never did, for something occurred.

"Jim Bates, when he found hisself out in the yard with the cashbox an' Tom Brewitt's watch, began to think things over very sudden. He changed his mind about separatin' Jane an' the cashbox, an' he started off to part 'em just as far as possible in the longest jumps he could make. An' poor Jane, she couldn't go after him because of what occurred in the meantime; an' so she lost the only man that ever came a-courtin' to her, an' died an old maid at last."

"What was it as occurred in the meantime?" asked somebody.

"It's all very well for you to laugh, neighbors," proceeded Dan, ignoring the interruption; "but I count 'tis a bitter thing for a poor gal to live her life through, young at first an' old at last, an' die, an' never get the kindness a woman looks for, and that she sees the others getting. You laugh at poor Jane Brewitt with her ugly face, but she's the same under her skin as the handsomest gal in Essex. An' that's the same with all of us. Abel Pennyfather 'ud look quite decent if you skinned him. Well, well!"

"But you ha'n't told us what occurred that stopped her," protested Prentice.

"Den't I? Well there now! It caused a

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rare fanteeg, though, the hullabaloo after Jim Bates. When they all woke up, Tom Brewitt wasted ten minutes tryin' to tell the time o' night by the padlock; an' Bob, not quite awake and still mixin' up the safe-door an' the casement in his mind, shoved his head into the safe an' bawled, 'Stop thief!' till he nigh deaf-an'-dumbed hisself. But they caught Jim Bates in the mornin', though, an' he went to Springfield gaol once more. Here's better luck to us. 'Tis a dry oad tale."

Dan reached for Abel Pennyfather's new-filled mug, and Abel, loudly protesting, recovered it empty.

"Your mug? Well there," said Dan, with his hand on the door-knob as he rose. "There be nothing so catchin' in the world as that there absence o' mind. It'll be Banham's turn next."

"But what was't occurred to stop Jane Brewitt?" cried everybody, except Pennyfather.

"Oh, that?" Dan answered, turning the door-knob and pulling the door conveniently ajar. "Well, you see, she picked up two pairs o' top-boots all right, but when she got to Sam's door—you see he'd come home from market as full of absence o' mind as any man could carry, an' you know they brew it strong at Rochford. So, natural enough, he tucked up his boots in bed an' went asleep outside hisself. So that when

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his sister came along in the dark with two pair o' boots an' fell over him, he jumps up an'_____”

But the empty mug hit the door as it closed, and it cost Abel Pennyfather eighteen pence.

THE STOLEN BLENKINSOP

I

IF it had been necessary for Mr. Hector Bushell to make a fortune for himself there can be little doubt that he would have done it. Fortunately or unfortunately—just as you please—the necessity did not exist, for his father had done it for him before he was born. Consequently, Hector, who was a genial if somewhat boisterous young man, devoted his talents to the service of his friends, whose happiness he insisted on promoting, with their concurrence or without it, by the exercise of his knowledge of the world and whatever was in it, his business-like acumen, his exuberant animal spirits, and his overflowing, almost pestilential, energy. Quiet-mannered acquaintances who spied him afar dodged round corners and ran, rather than have their fortunes made by his vigorously-expressed advice, enforced by heavy slaps on the shoulder and sudden digs in the ribs, and sometimes punctuated with a hearty punch in the chest. For he was a large and strong, as well as a noisy, young man, accurately, if vulgarly, de-

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scribed by his acquaintance as perpetually "full of beans."

He had given himself a reputation as an art critic, on the strength of a year or two's attendance at an art school in Paris; and, indeed, he maintained a studio of his own, expensively furnished, where he received his friends and had more than once begun a picture. But his energies in this matter were mainly directed to the good of painters among his acquaintances, who were under the necessity of living by their work. He told them how their pictures should be painted, and how they could certainly be sold. Indeed, in this latter respect he did better than advise the painter—he advised the buyer, when he could seize one, and trundled him captive in the studio of his nearest friend with great fidelity and enthusiasm.

"The chance of your life, my dear sir!" he would say, snatching at the lapel of some wealthy friend's coat, and raising the other hand with an imminent threat of a slap on the shoulder. "The chance of your life! *The* coming man, I assure you! Something *like* an investment. A picture they'll offer you thousands for some day, and I do believe I can get it for you for a couple of hundred! Come and see it before some dealer gets in!"

It was with some such speech as this that he interrupted Mr. Higby Fewston, the margarine

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magnate, full of the report of the robbery a day before of a Gainsborough portrait from a house in Charles Street, Berkeley Square. Mr. Fewston was not the sort of man to take a deal of interest in pictures for their own sake, but the newspapers estimated the money value of the missing picture at twenty thousand pounds, and he found that very touching. He had the same respect for that Gainsborough, which he had never seen, that he would have had for a cheque for the sum signed by the firm of Rothschild; rather more, in fact, for if the cheque were stolen it might be stopped, and so rendered valueless; but there was no stopping the Gainsborough till you had caught the thief. So that Mr. Fewston found himself taking an unwonted interest in art; and when Hector Bushell, seizing the opportunity and pulling at his arm, drew him in the direction of Sydney Blenkinsop's studio, he offered less resistance than otherwise he might have done.

"Man named Blenkinsop," declaimed the zealous Hector. "Capital chap, and paints like—like a double archangel. His studio's close by—come and look for yourself. Of course, nothing need be said about buying the picture, if you don't want to. But just come and see it—I'll pretend we were passing and just dropped in. You'll have the sort of chance that people had in Gainsborough's own time. Why, I don't

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suppose *he* got more than a couple of hundred or so for the very picture the papers are so full of to-day!"

Mr. Fewston suffered himself to be dragged through many streets—the studio was not so near as Hector's enthusiasm made it seem—and finally into the presence of Mr. Sydney Blenkinsop, the painter. Blenkinsop was, by the side of Bushell, a comparatively quiet young man, not without apprehension of the possible consequences of his friend's devotion; for one never could tell what wild things Bushell might have been saying about one.

"Ah, Sydney, old boy!" cried that enthusiast. "How have you been all this time?" They had last met the day before, when Hector had hauled in some other possible patron. "How have you been? Just looked in as we were passing, you know—just looked in! This is my friend, Mr. Higby Fewston, much interested in art, and what he don't know about a picture—well, there! Working on anything just now, eh? I say"—this with a start of apprehension—"you haven't sold that picture yet, have you? The stunner, you know, the Keston?"

"Oh, that?" responded Blenkinsop, who had never sold a picture in his life. "No, I haven't. Not that one."

"Ah, plain enough Agnew hasn't been here lately. I'd like to have another look at it, old

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chap; probably sha'n't have another chance, unless it goes somewhere where I know the people. Ah, there now; look at that now!"

Mr. Fewston looked at it blankly. "It—it's a *landscape*," he said, presently, after consideration. The stolen Gainsborough had been a portrait, and Mr. Fewston liked things up to sample.

"Rather!" replied Hector. "It *is* a landscape, as you say, and no mistake! Something like a landscape that, eh? I knew you'd like it, of course, having an eye for such a thing. Ah, it's a topper!"

He fell back by the side of the man of margarine, and the two inspected the marvel in silence, the one with head aside and a smile of ecstasy, and the other with all the expression of a cow puzzled by a painted field with nothing to eat on it. Sydney Blenkinsop shuffled uneasily.

Presently Mr. Fewston thought of something to say. "Where was it taken?" he asked.

"Keston Common," murmured Sydney faintly and "Keston Common" repeated Hector loudly, making the title sound like a fresh merit. He also drew attention to the wonderful effects of light in the picture, the extraordinary painting of the sky, the subtle suggestion of atmosphere, and the marvellous "values". Mr. Fewston listened patiently to the end. There was another pause longer and more awkward than the last; it

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seemed likely to endure till something burst in Sydney Blenkinsop. Then, at last, Mr. Higby Fewston spoke, weightily.

"Keston," he said, with solemn conviction, "is a place I don't like. There's a bad train service."

Such a criticism as this even Hector Bushell could not readily answer. He attempted to evade the point and returned again to his "values." But any reference to values unsupported by definite figures made little impression on the commercial mind of Mr. Fewston, and in a very few minutes more he drifted out, with Hector Bushell still in close attendance.

Hector, however, remained with the margarine Mæcenas only long enough to discharge another volley of admiration for the picture, and took his leave at the first convenient corner. As a consequence he was back in five minutes, to discover Sydney Blenkinsop vengefully kicking a lay figure.

"Don't bring another chap like that to this place," cried the painter savagely, "or I'll pitch him out o' window!"

"My dear chap, don't be an ass! You've got no business instincts. A man like that's invaluable, if you can only kid him on. He'll buy any old thing, if he buys at all."

"If!"

"You're an ungrateful infidel. I tell you I'm

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going to sell that 'Keston Common' for you. What could you do with it by yourself?"

"Put a stick through it—burn it—anything! I'm sick of the whole business."

"Just what I expected. You could put a stick through it or burn it—and what's the good of that?"

"What's the harm? I can't sell it and they won't hang it at the shows; I know that before I send it."

"You know everything that's no use to you, and nothing that pays. You can burn a picture, but you can't sell it. Now, I'm going to sell that picture for you, if you'll let me. Will you?"

"You can do what you like with it."

"Done with you, my boy! I'll make you famous with it, and I'll get you money for it. I've an idea such as you couldn't invent in a lifetime. Shut up the shop now and we'll talk it over at the Café Royal. Come along. We'll have a little dinner out of the money I'm going to make for you. But you've to take orders from me, mind!"

II

THE evening papers flamed with the tale of the lost Gainsborough, as the morning papers had done before them, and the morning papers of

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the next day kept up the flame with scarcely diminished violence. Sydney Blenkinsop rose with nothing but a headache to distinguish him from the other unknown people about him, but by lunch-time he was as famous as Gainsborough himself. For another picture had been stolen. The evening papers came out stronger than ever, giants refreshed by a new sensation, with the blinding headline, ANOTHER PICTURE ROBBERY! Sub-headings sang of A DANGEROUS GANG AT WORK, and deplored A YOUNG PAINTER'S MISSING MASTERPIECE. Sydney Blenkinsop was the young painter, and the view of Keston Common was the missing masterpiece. In the eyes of thousands of worthy people Mr. Sydney Blenkinsop became an artist second only in importance to Gainsborough, if second to anybody; and Mr. Sydney Blenkinsop, himself appalled by the overwhelming success of Mr. Hector Bushell's scheme, would have fled the country, but for the superior will-power of that same Hector Bushell, who never left his side.

For journalists haunted the studio and "wrote up" the whole business afresh for every edition of all the daily newspapers in England. Sydney would have bolted the door and fled from the rear, but Hector ordered in caviare sandwiches and oyster patties and a case of champagne, and was the life and soul of the party. When Sydney seemed at a loss for a judicious answer—which

occurred pretty often—Hector was instantly equal to the occasion. The main story was simple enough, and was cunningly left to rest entirely on the word of the police. The constable on the beat had perceived, in the gray of the morning, that a window of the studio had been opened, and a pane broken in the process. Nobody seemed to be in the place, so the policeman kept watch by the window till assistance arrived, when it was found that obviously a thief had entered the studio, and had got safely away. It was not found possible to communicate with Mr. Blenkinsop till the morning was well advanced and somebody was found who knew the address of his lodgings; and then he was met as he was leaving home for the studio, in company with his friend, Mr. Bushell. Things in the studio had been much disarranged, and the picture, a view of Keston Common, had been cut from its frame and taken.

So much for the simple facts as observed by the police; but the frills, embroideries, tassels, tinsels, and other garnishings, which lent variety and interest to the narrative came in an inexhaustible and glorious torrent from Hector Bushell. He took each separate journalist aside and gave him the special privilege of some wholly new and exclusive information as to the surprising genius of Sydney Blenkinsop, and the amazing prices his pictures were worth and would certainly

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fetch, some day. Doubtless the thief was a knowing file, and was laying up for the future—"saving his stake," as it were. Any possible slump in Gainsboroughs—of course, nobody expected it, but such a thing might happen—would be compensated by the certain rise in Blenkinsops. And with this astute suggestion Hector shut one eye, tapped the side of his nose, and surprised the favored reporter with one of his celebrated digs in the ribs.

The newspapers on their part neglected nothing. Gainsborough and Blenkinsop had a column apiece, side by side, in most of them, and in the rest they had more, or were fraternally mingled together. "Is no masterpiece safe?" asked the Press. And, answering its own question with no more than a paragraph's delay, the Press gave its opinion that no masterpiece was. To have put in question the new-born eminence of Blenkinsop would have been to spoil the boom in the most unbusinesslike way. Of course, a Turner, or a Raeburn, or another Gainsborough would have been preferable, but as it was the Press had to do its best with the materials to hand, and so it did, to the glory of Blenkinsop. The notion of a thief or a gang of thieves going about after valuable pictures was too good to waste, and every newspaper expressed the sage conjecture that, where one picture was, there would the other be found. One scribbling cynic

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managed to squeeze in a hint that this might suggest the valuable clue of lunacy in the culprit; though nobody noticed that in the general flood of Blenkinsopperry.

But in the intervals of interviewing, when the friends had a few minutes of private conversation, there was a notable lack of gratitude in Sydney's acknowledgments.

"This is a fine ghastly mess you've landed me in!" he protested, at the first opportunity. "How do you expect me to look all these people in the face?"

"How? Oh, the usual way—only the usual way, you know! The more usual the better. *I* don't find any difficulty!"

"You? No—you're enjoying it; you've the cheek for anything. I'm the sufferer. I've had to stand here and yarn to a police-inspector about the beastly business!"

"Yarn! The simple, plain, clear truth! You dined with me last night at the Café Royal, leaving the studio just as usual. And in the morning you came here, also as usual, and found the police in charge. Straightforward enough. Of course, he didn't ask you anything about *me*. It seems to me you've got the soft job. I'm doing all the work, and as to enjoying it, of course I am! Why aren't you?"

"Enjoying it! Good heavens, man, I never

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expected such a row as this; I was a fool to listen to you."

"Now, there!" Hector Bushell spread his arms in injured protest. "There's ingratitude! I've positively made you the most celebrated painter alive, all in the course of a few hours, and you—you pretend you don't like it! Oh, come off it! Why, there are thousands of respectable people in this country to-day, who couldn't name six painters who ever lived, that know all about you—and Gainsborough. I fetched the Press round—did it all!"

"And how's it all going to end? And where is the picture? Why won't you tell me that?"

"Well, I was afraid somebody might catch on to a sort of idea that you knew where it was, and I wanted you to be able to say you didn't, that's all. Nobody has had any such unworthy suspicions, and so there's no harm in inviting you to admire the dodge. When I got home last night, with the canvas rolled up under my arm, I just took it to bed with me till the morning. When I woke I thought it over, and I remembered a big roll of old stair-carpet up in a garret where nobody went—a useless old roll that my dear old mother has dragged about with us for years—ever since we lived in Russell Square, in fact. It's never been touched since it came, and never will be. So I nipped out and up into the garret with the picture, unrolled

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a few yards of the carpet, slipped the canvas in very carefully, painted side out, rolled up the carpet again, tied it, and shoved it back among the other old lumber. And there it can stay, safe as the Bank, till we want it again!"

"Till we want it again! And when will that be?"

"When we've sold it. You leave it to me, my bonny boy. Remember that other Gainsborough that was stolen—the 'Duchess.' Would that have fetched such a price if it hadn't been stolen and boomed up? Not on your life. I'm out to sell that picture for you, and I'm going to do it—to say nothing of immortal glory, which I'm positively shovelling on you where you stand. Hark! There's another reporter. Keep up that savage, worried look—it's just the thing for the plundered genius!"

But this visitor was no reporter. It was, indeed, Mr. Higby Fewston, much more alert and affable than yesterday, and eager for news of the picture.

"Is there any chance of getting it?" he asked, with some eagerness. "Have the police got on the track of the thief yet?"

"No, they haven't yet," replied Hector Bushell, calmly. "But I should think there was a very good chance of getting the picture, ultimately."

"I suppose you'll offer a reward?"

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"Well, we'll have to think it over. It's a bit early as yet."

"Tell me now," Mr. Fewston pursued, with increasing animation, "can the picture be properly repaired? Isn't it cut out of the frame?"

"Yes, but that's nothing. It's easily relined and put back."

"That's satisfactory. And now as to the flowers—I think I remember yellow flowers right in the front of the picture. They *are* cowslips, I hope?"

"Oh, yes—cowslips, of course," replied Hector, with easy confidence, since cowslips seemed to be required. While Sydney Blenkinsop, who had spotted in a few touches of yellow in the foreground because it seemed to be wanted, and with a vague idea of possible furze-blossoms, or buttercups, gasped and wondered.

"And I suppose more cowslips could be put in, if required, by a competent man?"

"I don't think any more are required," put in Sydney Blenkinsop, decidedly.

"No—very likely not—just an inquiry. I *did* think at the time there seemed to be rather a lot of cowslips for Keston Common, but I do a good deal in the 'Cowslip' brand of—the—the article I deal in, and there might be a possibility of reproducing the work as an advertisement. One has to consider all these things, of course; and on the whole I'd like

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to buy that picture, if you get it back. What about price?"

"Five hundred," said Hector, promptly, before Sydney could open his mouth.

"Um, rather high, isn't it?" commented Fewston equably. "I was thinking of, say, three hundred."

"Well, yes," Hector responded, just as affably. "Yesterday that might have done, but just now it's to-day." And he regarded the margarine magnate with a long, deliberate, placid wink.

"Ah well, I understand, of course," replied Fewston, who appeared to far better advantage to-day, discussing business, than yesterday, misunderstanding art. "Of course, I quite recognize that all this publicity—naturally Mr. Blenkinsop wants all the benefit possible from it—quite legitimate, of course. But there, the picture isn't recovered yet. Meantime, I may consider I have the refusal of it contingently, I suppose. You see, Mr. Bushell—you are evidently a man of business—this may be useful to me. A great deal of space is being devoted to Mr. Blenkinsop and his picture in the papers, and I—well, it would be worth my while to be in it, as conspicuously as possible. Do you perceive?"

"I think I see. To-morrow morning's papers, for instance: 'We are at liberty to state that Mr. Sydney Blenkinsop's now famous picture

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was destined for the galleries of one of the best known of our merchant princes; in fact, that in the event of its hoped-for recovery it is to be purchased by Mr. Higby Fewston, and will make a conspicuous feature of that gentleman's collection.' I think that can go in—no doubt even a little more."

"Excellent! Will you do that? And it is understood that if you get the picture—you say there's a very good chance—I have first refusal."

"At five hundred pounds."

"Three hundred, I think."

"Wouldn't do, really, as things go. Consider what the Gainsborough would cost you if you could get that, now that it has been stolen!"

"Well, well, we'll leave it at *four* hundred, unless you get a higher offer; it's rather absurd discussing this, with the picture lost. But I do want to be sure that I get proper publicity in the papers. You'll see to that, won't you? You see, this is just the time I want it. I am putting up for the County Council, and—this *strictly* between ourselves—there is just the possibility that I may be turning my business into a limited company. So all these things help, and I and my family are keeping ourselves forward as much as possible just now. Mrs. Fewston, for instance, is making an appeal for

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the Stockjobbers' Almhouses, and running a sale. And this picture—well, if it's recovered we shan't quarrel about the price so long as you get me well into the papers in the meantime. You see, I'm perfectly frank—we'll do our best for each other, mutually."

And so it was settled between Mr. Fewston and the untiring Bushell, while Sydney Blenkinsop hovered uneasily in the background, a superfluous third party in the disposal of his own picture; which also seemed to be superfluous, so far as its merits were concerned—or even its present possession.

III

MR. HIGBY FEWSTON was well satisfied with the next morning's newspapers. Hector Bushell saw to it that every office was supplied with information of the merits and doings of that patron of fine art, and during the day the evening papers interviewed Mr. Fewston himself, to the combined glory of Fewston and Blenkinsop. Mr. Fewston expressed strong opinions as to the inefficiency of the police, and made occasion to allude to his views on the London County Council. Speaking as an art critic Mr. Fewston considered Mr. Blenkinsop certainly the greatest painter of the present time; and the stolen masterpiece was a great loss to

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him, personally, the intending purchaser. There could be no doubt, in Mr. Fewston's mind, that the same clever gang had captured the two great pictures—evidently educated criminals of great artistic judgment. And then came certain notable and mysterious hints as to astonishing things that Mr. Fewston might say as to the whereabouts of the plunder, if it were judicious—which at this moment, of course, it was not.

The "boom" went so well that Sydney Blenkinsop himself began to look upon his sudden notoriety with a more complacent eye. In another day or two the affair had run best part of the ordinary course of a newspaper sensation, the Bishop of London had given his opinion on it, and while the Gainsborough column shrank considerably, the Blenkinsop column became a mere paragraph at its foot. It would seem to be the proper moment for the recovery of the picture.

And now it grew apparent that this was the great difficulty. What had been done was easy enough; it had almost done itself—with the constant help of Hector. But to restore the picture—naturally, unsuspectingly, and without putting anybody in gaol—this was a job that grew more difficult the more it was considered. Hector Bushell grew unwontedly thoughtful, and Sydney Blenkinsop began to get ungrateful again. He had been dragged up a blind alley,

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he said, and now he wanted to know the way out. Hector smoked a great many strong cigars without being able to tell him.

They parted moodily one night toward the end of the week, and the next day Sydney was alone in his studio all the morning. He was growing fidgety and irritable, notwithstanding his new-found eminence, and he wondered what kept Hector away. Was he going to shirk now that the real pinch was coming? Work was impossible, so the partaker in Gainsborough's glory loafed and smoked and kicked his furniture, and smoked and loafed again. His lunch was brought him from the corner public-house, and he ate what he could of it. Then he took to looking out of door, as is the useless impulse of everybody anxiously awaiting a visitor. He had done it twice, and was nearing the lobby again when the cry of a running newsboy struck his ear. He pulled the door open hurriedly, for in the shout he seemed to hear something like the name Gainsborough. There came the boy, shouting at each studio door as he passed, and waving his papers. Sydney extended his coin and snatched the paper as the boy ran past. It was fact; he *had* heard the name of Gainsborough, for the thousandth time that week. The picture had been discovered in the thief's lodgings, but the thief had bolted and was still at large. There was not much of it under the

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staring headline, but so much was quite clear. The picture was found, but the thief had got away.

Wasn't there a chance in this? Surely there ought to be. Why didn't Hector Bushell come? Surely, if they were prompt enough, some little dodge might be built on this combination of circumstances, by which his picture might be brought to light again—this also without the thief. They knew, now, where the thief *had* been, and that he was gone. This was good news. Hector could certainly make something of that. Where was he?

He was at the door in the lobby, in the studio, even as the thought passed. Flushed and rumpled, wild of eye, with dust on his coat and a dint in his hat, Hector Bushell dropped into the nearest seat with an inarticulate "G'lor!"

"What's up?" cried Sydney. "The Gainsborough—do you know? They've got it!"

"Blow the Gainsborough—where's the Blenkinsop? Sydney, it's a bust up!"

"What is?"

"The whole festive caboodle! The entire bag of tricks! My mother's been and sent the roll of stair-carpet to the jumble sale!"

"The *what*?"

"Jumble sale—Mrs. Fewston's jumble sale; Stockjobbers' Almhouse Fund!"

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"Great heavens!"—Sydney leapt for his hat—"where is it? When is it! What——"

"No go!" interrupted Hector, with a feeble wave of the hand. "No go! It's to-day—I've been there. Blazed off there the moment I knew it. They'd sold the carpet to an old woman just before I arrived. Nice girl I know, helping at Mrs. Fewston's stall, told me that. Just then up came Mrs. Fewston herself, glaring straight over my head as though I was too small and too beastly to look at. A dead cut, if ever I saw one! I felt a bit uneasy at that. But the nice girl told me the name of the old woman who had the carpet and where she lived. So I streaked out after her and caught her two streets off; she was shoving her plunder home in a perambulator. I grabbed it with both hands and offered to buy it. I was a bit wild and sudden, I expect, and the old girl didn't understand; started screaming, and laid into me with an umbrella. I wasn't going to wait for a crowd, so I out with the stair-carpet and bowled it open all along the pavement. There was no picture in it—nothing! I kicked it the whole length out, all along the street, and then pelted round the next corner while the old party was tangled up with the other end. Sydney, my boy, Fewston's got that picture now! The carpet was sent to the house!"

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"What in the world shall we do? We're in a fine sort of mess!"

For a time Hector Bushell had no answer: he was considering many things. Mrs. Fewston's disdainful cut; the fact that the carpet—and the picture—had been in Fewston's house since the evening of the day before yesterday. Also he wondered why Fewston had made no sign. He had had a full day and a half to flare up in, if he had felt that way inclined; but there had been no flare. Why? Hector's faculties gradually ranged themselves and he began to understand. Could Fewston afford to stultify himself after the advertisement he had so eagerly snatched? And there were the interviews in the newspapers! And the County Council election! And the limited company! It grew plain that Mr. Fewston's interests were not wholly divorced from their own, after all.

"What shall we do?" reiterated Sydney, wildly. "We're in a most hideous mess!"

"Mess?" repeated Hector, straightening his hat and gradually assuming his customary placidity. "Mess? Oh, I don't know, after all. I was a bit startled at first, but we haven't accused anybody, you know. *We're* perfectly innocent. If you like to authorize me to get in at your studio window to fetch a picture, why shouldn't you? And if the police like to jump to conclu-

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sions—well, they ought to know better. Lend me a clothes-brush.”

“But what about Fewston?”

“That’s why I want the clothes-brush. He’s in it pretty deep, one way and another, eh? We’ll go round and collect that money.”

CAP'EN JOLLYFAX'S GUN

THE fame of Cap'en Jollyfax's gun spread wide over Thames mouth and the coasts thereabout, in the years before and after the middle of the nineteenth century. The gun was no such important thing to look at, being a little brass cannon short of a yard long, standing in a neat little circle of crushed cockle-shell, with a border of nicely matched flints, by the side of Cap'en Jollyfax's white flagstaff, before Cap'en Jollyfax's blue front door, on the green ridge that backed the marshes and overlooked the sea. But small as Cap'en Jollyfax's gun might be to look at, it was most amazingly large to hear; perhaps not so deep and thunderous as loud and angry, with a ringing bang that seemed to tear the ear-drums.

Cap'en Jollyfax fired the gun at midnight on Christmas eve, to start the carollers. Again he fired it at midnight between the old year and the new, to welcome the year; on the ninth of January, because that was the anniversary of Nelson's funeral, and on the twenty-eighth, because that was the date of the battle of Aliwal, then a recent victory. He fired it on

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the Queen's birthday, on Waterloo day, Trafalgar day, St. Clement's day—for Clement was the parish saint—and on the anniversary of the battle of the Nile; and on the fifth of November he fired it at intervals all day long, and as fast as he could clean and load it after dark. He also fired it on his own birthday, on Roboshobery Dove's, Sam Prentice's, old Tom Blyth's, and any other casual birthday he might hear of. He fired it in commemoration of every victory reported during the Crimean war and the Indian Mutiny, he fired it to celebrate all weddings, some christenings, and once when they hanged a man at Springfield gaol.

Cap'en Jollyfax was a retired master mariner of lusty girth and wide and brilliant countenance. In the intervals between the discharges of his gun he painted his cottage, his flagstaff, his garden fence and gate, and any other thing that was his on which paint would stay, except the gun, which he kept neatly scoured and polished.

He painted the flagstaff white, the fence green, and the cottage in several colors; and the abiding mystery of Cap'en Jollyfax's establishment was what ultimately became of the paint. For a new coat succeeded the last very soon after the surface was sufficiently dry, and the consumption of paint was vast; and yet the flagstaff never seemed to grow much thicker, nor did the fence, as a reasonable person would expect, develop

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into a continuous wall of paint, supported within by a timber skeleton.

Cap'en Jollyfax was a popular man on the whole, though perhaps more particularly so with boys, because of his gun. They would congregate about the fence to watch him clean it and load it, and the happiest of all boys was the one who chanced to be nearest when it was fired, and whose ears were loudest assailed by the rending bang that was so delightful to every boy's senses. Boys dreamed at night of some impossible adventure by the issue whereof the happy dreamer was accorded the reward of permission to fire Cap'en Jollyfax's gun; and one boy at least formed a dark project of hoarding pennies, buying powder, escaping by perilous descent from his bedroom window, and firing Cap'en Jollyfax's gun lawlessly in the depth of night.

But if the gun enhanced Cap'en Jollyfax's popularity among the boys, its tendency was otherway with the women—those in particular who lived near enough to be startled by its noise. The natural feminine distrust of all guns in all circumstances was increased in the case of a brass cannon, which might go off at any moment of Cap'en Jollyfax's crowded calendar. And it was asserted that Mrs. Billing, the widow, who lived at the hill-foot, exactly under Cap'en Jollyfax's line of fire, had been startled into the destruction of three basins and a large dish with-

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in one month of many birthdays. Mrs. Billing, indeed, as was to be expected from her situation, was the brass gun's chief enemy. Consequently, if Cap'en Jollyfax had dragged his gun up the aisle of Leigh church and fired it under the pulpit he could scarcely have startled the parishioners more than did the rector when he first read the banns of marriage between John Jollyfax, bachelor, and Mary Ann Billing, widow, both of that parish.

Except for the gun there need have been little to startle Leigh, for Cap'en Jollyfax was none so old, as retired skippers went thereabout, and Mrs. Billing was as neat and pleasant a widow of forty-two as might be found in Essex, where the widows have always been admirable. Moreover, she had no incumbrance in the way of children.

But there was no mistaking the fact now, even for the deaf who were not at church. For the succeeding fortnight and a day or two over Cap'en Jollyfax and Mrs. Billing were visible, day by day and arm-in-arm, from shop to shop, in Leigh High Street. The result was no great advance in the retail commerce of Leigh—in fact, none. The household appointments of both Cap'en Jollyfax and Mrs. Billing were fairly complete in their humble way; and when Mrs. Billing had triumphantly hauled Cap'en Jollyfax into an ironmonger's in pursuit of a

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certain fish-kettle or a particular fender, she was certain presently to discover that just such an article embellished Cap'en Jollyfax's kitchen, or her own. Nevertheless, she persevered, for a bout of shopping was the proper preliminary to any respectable wedding, and must be performed with full pomp and circumstance; and if nothing, or very little, was actually bought, so much the cheaper. Mrs. Billing was resolved to be baulked of no single circumstance of distinction and triumph appertaining to the occasion. And Cap'en Jollyfax was mightily relieved to find so much shopping cost so little after all; so that he grew gradually more cheerful as the wedding-day neared, which is said not to be invariably the case in these circumstances.

The wedding was fixed for the morning of a certain Wednesday, and on the evening before the day Mrs. Billing spent some little time in glorious authority on Cap'en Jollyfax's premises, superintending the labor of Mrs. Packwood, who did charing, and was now employed to make the domestic arrangements of the place suit the fancies of its coming mistress. Flushed with hours of undisputed command, Mrs. Billing emerged in the little garden, whereunto Cap'en Jollyfax had retreated early in the operations; and there perceived to-morrow's bridegroom in the act of withdrawing a broomstick from the mouth of the brass gun.

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"What ha' you been a-doing to that gun, John?" demanded Mrs. Billing rather peremptorily, eyeing the weapon askant.

"A-givin' her a rub up inside an' out," answered Cap'en Jollyfax placably. "An' I've just rammed her with a good big charge ready for to-morrow."

"Why for to-morrow?" Mrs. Billing's voice was a trifle sharper still, and she turned a fresh glance of unmistakable dislike on the gun.

"Why for to-morrow?" Cap'en Jollyfax repeated wonderingly. "Why, weddin'-day, o' course. Touch her off when we come home from church."

"Nothin' o' the sort." She spoke now with a positive snap. "A nasty, dangerous, banging thing as frightens people out of their seven senses. I won't hev it. Why, 'twere almost more'n I could stand down there at the bottom o' the hill, an' hev that thing go off near me I will not, so there."

Cap'en Jollyfax stared blankly. "What!" he jerked out, scarce believing his ears, "not fire the gun on the weddin'-day?"

"No," Mrs. Billing replied emphatically, "nor any other day, neither. Folk 'ud think you were a little boy, a-playin' with sich toys; an' I can't abear to be near the thing."

The staring wonder faded gradually from Cap'en Jollyfax's face, and a certain extra red-

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ness succeeded it. "I be goin' to fire my gun on my weddin'-day," he said firmly.

"You ben't nothin' o' the sort," rejoined the widow, no less firmly; "not on *my* weddin'-day. Nayther then nor after, if I'm your wife. Just you take the charge out o' that gun."

Cap'en Jollyfax shook his head, with something like triumph in his eye. "Won't come out 'cept you fire it," he said. "That's the only way."

"Very well then, fire it now—not now, but as soon as I be gone. Fire off your gun for the last time to-night, and be done with sich foolishness."

"Ben't nothin' to fire it for to-day," the old sailor returned shortly. "This gun's my department, an' I'm goin' to 'tend to it. I'm goin' to put the tarpaulin over it now, an' to-morrow, Polly, when we're back from church, I'm goin' to fire it."

Mrs. Billing bridled. "You're a-goin' to fire that gun before I go to church with 'ee, John Jollyfax, an' not load it agin, nayther."

"I'm a-goin' to fire this gun when we're back from church, an' afterwards when proper."

"Cap'en John Jollyfax, I ben't goin' to church with 'ee till after that gun be fired. So now you know. If you don't fire it to-night you must fire it to-morrow before I turn a step toward church. That's *my* word on it."

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"I'm a-goin' to fire my gun when I like," growled Cap'en Jollyfax, dogged and sulky.

"Very well," replied the widow, tossing her head and turning away, "then if you want me to wed 'ee, an' *when* you want me to wed 'ee, you'll fire it first. Then, maybe, I'll consider of it. But no wife o' yours I'll be till that powder be fired off. An' so good-evenin' to 'ee, Cap'en Jollyfax."

That was the beginning of a period of vast interest and excitement in Leigh and its neighborhood. Cap'en Jollyfax's gun remained silent all that night, nor was it fired in the morning. What Mrs. Billing's feelings were in the matter, whether she sat anxiously listening for the sound of the gun, as some averred, or dismissed the whole subject from her mind, as her subsequent conversation with Mrs. Peck suggested, are secrets I cannot pretend to have penetrated. Cap'en Jollyfax, on his part, consulted deeply in the morning with Roboshobery Dove, and evolved a scheme of strategy suited to the physical features of the place. As the hour fixed for the wedding drew near, Cap'en Jollyfax, in his best blue coat with brass buttons and his very shiniest hard glazed hat, approached the churchyard and took his seat, in a non-committal sort of way, on the low stone wall that bounded it, with his back toward the church. Roboshobery Dove crouched behind a corner of the same wall, vastly inconvenienced by his wooden leg, but

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steadily directing his telescope downhill, so that it bore exactly on the door of Mrs. Billing's cottage. It was Roboshobery's duty, as look-out man, to report instantly if Mrs. Billing were seen emerging from the door with her best bonnet on, in which event Cap'en Jollyfax would at once leave the wall and take up his position at the church door to receive her. Failing that, Cap'en Jollyfax would be spared the ignominy of waiting at the church for a bride who never came.

At intervals Cap'en Jollyfax took his pipe from his mouth and roared: "Look-out ahoy!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the unvarying reply.

"Hev'ee sighted?"

"Nothin' but the door!"

Whereat the watch would resume for ten minutes more.

It was three-quarters of an hour past the time fixed, when the rector, himself never very punctual, came angrily to the church door, surveyed the small crowd which had gathered, and became aware of Cap'en Jollyfax's strategy.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded of Mrs. Peck, who, in fact, was spying in the interests of the opposite party. "Where's Mrs. Billing?"

"Mrs. Billing, sir, she say she'll never think o' comin' till Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun."

The rector stared at Mrs. Peck for fifteen seconds, passed his fingers once backward and

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once forward through his hair, and then without a word retired to the vestry.

Roboshobery Dove maintained his watch, and the little crowd waited patiently till the shadow of the dial over the church porch lay well past twelve o'clock, and the legal time for a wedding was over. Then Cap'en Jollyfax hauled out his silver watch and roared, though Roboshobery Dove was scarce a dozen yards off: "Look-out ahoy!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Eight bells!"

With that Roboshobery Dove hauled out his own watch, banged it, as usual, on the socket of his wooden leg, clapped it against his ear, and then held it before his eyes. Finally, having restored the watch to his breeches-pocket, he shut the telescope, stood erect and rejoined his principal; and the two old sailors stumped off solemnly toward Cap'en Jollyfax's cottage.

All that day Cap'en Jollyfax's gun remained silent, and all the next. The day after that was June the first, on which date Cap'en Jollyfax had been wont to fire the gun in celebration of Howe's victory. But this time the Glorious First went unhonored, and it was perceived that Cap'en Jollyfax was mighty stubborn. Monday, the fourth, was Sam Prentice's birthday, but Cap'en Jollyfax's gun stood dumb still.

Leigh had never before listened so eagerly for

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a bang as it listened now for the report that should publish the submission of Cap'en Jollyfax; but still the report did not come. People took sides, and bets were made. It was observed that Cap'en Jollyfax was grown peevish and morose, that he shunned his friends and moped at home.

Mrs. Billing, on the other hand, went abroad as always, gay and smiling as ever. Cap'en Jollyfax might do as he pleased, said Mrs. Billing, but she wasn't going to marry him while the charge remained in that gun. If he chose to fire it out—well, she might think over the matter again, but she was none so sure of even that, now.

The days went on, and Cap'en Jollyfax's friends grew concerned for him. He was obstinate enough, but brooding, it was plain. Roboshobery Dove, with much ingenuity, sought to convince him that by persisting in his determination he was defeating himself, since there was now an end of gun-fire altogether. Cap'en Jollyfax thought a little over that aspect of the case, but did not fire the gun. It was thought, however, that he could scarce hold out much longer. He was said to have been seen one afternoon stealthily rubbing over the gun and renewing the priming.

A fortnight went, and with June the eighteenth everybody expected to see an end of the

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business; for in truth Waterloo day would have made the best excuse of the year. But for the first time since Cap'en Jollyfax came to the cottage Waterloo day passed unsaluted. People wondered and shook their heads; surely it couldn't last much longer?

And indeed it did not. There was another silent day, and then in the dead of night of the nineteenth, Leigh was startled once more by the bang of Cap'en Jollyfax's gun. Louder and sharper than ever it rang in the still of the night, and folk jumped upright in their beds at the shock. Heads pushed out from latticed casements in Leigh High Street, and conversation passed between opposite gables.

"Did 'ee hear? 'Twere up at Cap'en Jollyfax's!"

"Hear? I'd think so! Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun!"

And so word passed all through Leigh and about on the moment, within house and out of window: "Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun! Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun!"

But in fact no sleeper in all Leigh bounced higher in his bed than Cap'en Jollyfax himself; and that for good reason, for the gun was almost under his bedroom window.

The gun! It was the gun! Somebody had fired it! Those boys—those rascal boys, rascalion boys, cheeky boys, plaguey, villainous

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accursed, infernal boys! Cap'en Jollyfax fell into a pair of trousers and downstairs in one complicated gymnastic, and burst into the garden under the thin light of a clouded moon. There stood the gun, uncovered, and there by its side lay the tarpaulin—no, not the tarpaulin, it would seem, but a human figure; a woman in a swoon.

Cap'en Jollyfax turned her over and stared close down into her face. "Why!" he cried, "Polly! Polly! What's this?"

With that her eyes opened. "Be that you, John?" she said. "I den't count 'twould go off that fearful sudden!"

SNORKEY TIMMS, HIS MARKS

THIS is another tale of Snorkey Timms, the disreputable acquaintance of whom I have written in other places. It is now years since I saw Snorkey, and I never had the faintest excuse for such an acquaintanceship, except that he was an amusing scoundrel and full of information that cannot be derived from any person of the smallest respectability.

It was at a time long after Snorkey's adventure with the bags of bricks at Liverpool Street, of which I have told elsewhere, after he had told it me in a faro-house at Whitechapel; the time, in fact, was when the banker at that same faro-table was the envy of Snorkey's soul and his ideal of sublunary good fortune. From Snorkey's point of view, indeed, there was reason. Snorkey was a mere Cockney picker-up of trifles—and other things—that were not too carefully watched; Mr. Issy Marks during the day was a wholesale merchant with a fancy-goods warehouse in a little turning out of Houndsditch, and in the evening he sat at the receipt of custom at the faro-den, the only man at the table who always won. Indeed, he paid the proprietor fifteen shillings an hour for the privilege of

sitting banker, and made a very handsome thing of it on the top of that. Why Snorkey and others like him should have persisted in contributing nightly to Mr. Issy Marks' income was not a question easily to be resolved by the impartial observer; the language wherewith they signalized their regular losses wholly precluded the supposition that they did it out of sheer benevolence to Mr. Marks. Yet they were far from being fools in the ordinary sense, and, in fact, were rather apt to pride themselves on their general knowingness; still they came, stood before the eight squares chalked on the table, saw their stakes decrease and vanish by a system which plainly and obviously must benefit the banker all through and nobody else, went away poor and angry, and came again the next night and all the nights after that to lose more money. There was no reason in it, but there was the phenomenon, and Mr. Marks did very well out of it, as did many another "banker" in many another gambling-house in those parts.

For this, and for the presumed wealth in the fancy-goods business, Mr. Issy Marks was regarded with much envy. The business had its place in a humpbacked little old house that stood uncomfortably shouldered and squeezed between two larger buildings, not so old but quite as dirty, in a rather grimy little street that led from Houndsditch to some undiscovered region be-

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yond. There were scores of such places thereabout, with huddled little thick-framed windows, wherein flashy cheap china ornaments, framed oleographs, combs on cards of a dozen, shell covered boxes, brushes, sponges, and a hundred such things tumbled loose among cardboard boxes. These establishments were the small wholesale concerns which supplied still smaller retail shops in the eastern and southern suburbs. There were bigger houses among them than Mr. Marks's, and busier; but his had the reputation—at least among his humble admirers—of carrying a solid trade of the sort called “snug.”

Now it was the quaint and interesting custom of Snorkey and all his friends of like habits, to inspect very often, and with loving care, the premises of prosperous persons who aroused their respect and envy as Mr. Marks had done Snorkey's. They counted the windows and speculated on the probable interior fastenings of doors. They peeped through keyholes unobserved, affectionately patted shutters, and groped inquiringly about their iron fastenings. Their kindly interest even extended to the houses adjoining, the roofs, ladders, trapdoors, and possible means of intercommunication. They have been known to stand in cold streets for hours watching the lights on the window-blinds that screened the objects of their solicitude, and even the most careless of them never omitted to

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make sympathetic, if unostentatious, inquiries as to the comings and goings of the inmates, and the exact positions of their sleeping apartments.

Snorkey, therefore, was aware that Mr. Issy Marks' warehouse was locked up and left to itself at night. He knew also that the back of the place could be reached from a paved alley by the scaling of an easy wall; that packing-cases littered the back yard; and that any person standing on one or two of the largest could reach a window that was not barred. Such things as these were always among the first noticed by Snorkey in any house in which he took an intelligent interest. And as regards this particular house, observation had taught him other things also. For instance, although the stock generally was not of a costly description, there was a good deal of cheap, thin, showy silver, which would melt down just as well as the same metal in heavier and more expensively finished pieces. There was a little safe in the back room on the ground floor, and there was all the possibility of a little jewellery. On the whole Snorkey decided that he had fallen in love with Mr. Marks' warehouse and must take an early opportunity to scrape a closer acquaintance.

The opportunity, in fact, seemed to be occurring every night; so that between the moment when Snorkey fully realized the state of his affections and the evening on which he seized

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his opportunity very few hours elapsed.

It was Mr. Marks's habit to bolt and bar his warehouse at seven each evening, and bid it and its business farewell till the next morning; for he lived at Mile End. On the evening of Snorkey's venture he left as usual, and Snorkey, from a convenient entry, saw him go. So much being ascertained, the adventurer loitered for an hour amid the society of the Three Tuns, and then leisurely took his way to the faro "club."

This place was reached by way of an innocent-looking door, with a very respectable electric bell, at the end of a little court of newly built offices and shops. If you were known, the door instantly opened to your ring; if you were not, you might ring the battery down without effect. That was because the door-keeper sat on a pair of steps within, with his eye near the fanlight. Snorkey Timms was no stranger, and with no more delay than sufficed for the silent opening and closing of the door, and a careful groping through a long passage, he emerged into the light and noise of the gaming-room. Mr. Marks was there as usual, with a cigar in his mouth, his hat at the back of his head, and his eyes on the cards he was shuffling and dealing on the table before him. An eager little crowd was clubbed thickly round the other three sides of the table, the rear rank climbing on the backs of the ranks before them, every man with his hand

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thrust out to its fullest reach, following the fortunes of his stake where it lay on the chalked diagram, and eager to snatch at the winnings that came so sparsely.

Snorkey staked a shilling, partly because he was always ready to gamble, and partly because, in view of the possible events of the night, it was not "the game" to make himself conspicuous by a change in his usual habit on this particular evening. The shilling went into Mr. Marks's heap, followed quickly by another, and two more, and some others after that.

"Banker's 'avin' all the luck again," remarked a friend to Snorkey. "Turns up the card with the most agin it every time, an' 'e's halved stakes eight times since I come in."

Snorkey tried a double chance with two shillings, and lost them in successive turns.

"No good—it's givin' 'im yer money to-night," remarked the friend. "There's a chap over here's bin puttin' down half quids an' quids, and never savin' a stake. Marks's luck's in to-night."

As a fact, the banker's luck always is in at faro, but to-night it was favoring him so well that even the punters noticed it; and punters at faro must either be blind in general to the banker's luck or take it as a matter of course. As his loose silver dwindled and Mr. Marks's heap of money rose, Snorkey grew the more resolved on

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his project for the night, and more and more persuaded that his claim on the Marks estate was a justifiable and, indeed, almost a legal one.

He stayed about the faro-table till near eleven, and then sauntered quietly out. It was scarce more than five minutes' walk to the house by Houndsditch, and the street, the warehouse, and the alley behind were all quiet and dark. But there was a light in a top window in the house to the left of Marks's, and, as Snorkey had the whole night before him for his adventure, he waited and took a turn about the streets to kill time.

When he returned it was nearer twelve than eleven and the lodger in the next house was in bed. Snorkey wasted no more time, but hurried into the paved alley and scaled the wall.

Mr. Marks's back yard was an uncomfortable place to traverse by night, short as the distance was; for unseen boxes and cases met the shins and knuckles of the explorer, and, while the quietest possible progress involved some amount of noise, there was always the danger of knocking over something with a thunderous clatter.

Snorkey was cautious and slow, for there was no need to hurry. He reached the wall of the house and stood to listen. It was a still night—too still for such an enterprise as Snorkey's; small sounds were very clear. But then if every burglar refused to work except in perfect condi-

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tions, the whole industry would come to a standstill.

There was no sound to cause uneasiness. There was the tread of a policeman, of course, but that was reassuring. It is a pleasant sound in the ear of a burglar, audible for an enormous distance, giving him confidence; when he cannot hear it he is never sure that the policeman isn't watching him. This friendly sound came from Houndsditch harmoniously beating time for the now subdued hum of London. The sky was clear and cloudless above, though dark; and a few stars looked down on Snorkey's experiment and winked encouragingly.

It is not easy to set one rough packing-case firmly on another, on a dark night, without noise; and when you have done it, even with a little noise, it is still more difficult to climb on the top case without a great deal more noise still, and more than a chance of a clamorous tumble. But these difficulties were surmounted, and once the window was reached, that offered no difficulties at all. For Snorkey had brought his tools. First, a catch-'em-alive-oh paper, doubled inward, so as to go safely in the pocket. This, being carefully opened out, was spread over the pane nearest the sash fastening and smacked in the middle with the flat hand. The pane was abolished, and came away in a hundred fragments, all sticking to the paper, and all quiet.

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Then it needed but the insertion of a hand to open the catch, and the window was conquered.

Snorkey climbed in, shut the window quietly, and pulled down the blind—a thing that Mr. Marks had neglected. Then he produced some more tools. First, a lantern made of nothing but a little tin box with a stump of candle in it, so that light was only thrown where it was needed, and a puff would quench it.

Now when the scrap of candle was lit, the first thing revealed to his sight was not at all what Snorkey was looking for. It was, in fact, a heap of shavings on the floor—wet shavings. It was partly under a table which was piled above with cardboard boxes, many of them broken. The boxes seemed damp, too, and when Snorkey approached to examine them he grew aware of a distinct smell of paraffin oil. There was nothing in the boxes, it would seem, but more shavings; and paper—also wet. Snorkey's eyebrows lifted and his lips pursed. But he saved the whistle for a future occasion.

He looked about the room. The walls were lined with shelves and stacked with boxes, but there seemed very little in the boxes. Mr. Marks appeared to be stocking a deal of straw and dirty paper. Also shavings, again. But there was one box of hair-brushes which much interested Snorkey. He knew that Marks sold many of these cheap, silver-backed hair-brushes whereof

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the silver covering behind, thin as paper, was stamped into much highly relieved ornament, with a view to a spurious massiveness of appearance; and he had designed to rip off those silver backs with a jack-knife and roll them up for easier transport. Well, here were the very brushes. But the silver backs had been ripped off already!

Snorkey dropped the lid on the box and saved up another whistle. Then he went out on the landing (where there were more shavings) and down the narrow stairs almost into another heap of shavings at the bottom. He made straight for the little safe, pulling from his inner coat pocket as he went the "stick," whose Christian name is James or Jemmy.

It was an elegant little weapon, with a fine chisel end, and he began by thrusting that chisel end in the crack of the door near the top. There are some of these cheap safes from which you may tear off the outer plate of the door in this very elementary way. This, however, did not seem to be one of them, for the immediate result was nothing but the breaking of a fragment from the point of the "James."

Snorkey gazed ruefully at the broken point—for the tool was a borrowed one—and then gave a twist to the cross handle in the middle of the door. The safe was unlocked!

The door swung open and disclosed account-

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books and nothing else. At the bottom were two little drawers, which were certainly locked, but came open with bent fronts at the first wrench of the "stick." They were empty.

Snorkey looked round the room and shook his head despondently. There was a perfect wealth of common shell boxes and cheap sponges here, but that was not the sort of wealth he had come for. The room also had its heap of shavings, piled against a stack of shell boxes, and a three-gallon can of paraffin oil stood near it.

He entered the shop very quietly, for now he might be heard from the street. The stock he disregarded, but tried the till. It contained not so much as a button. Clearly this was not the venture Snorkey had looked for. He shook his head again and returned to the back room. Then he very deliberately pocketed his tools, blew out his candle-light, and sat on the stairs to wait for Mr. Marks. For he had seen things that made him expect him.

It was very quiet, and more than a little dull. But presently the humor of the situation so presented itself to Snorkey that the silence was broken by a chuckle, which grew into something rather like a snigger. Mr. Marks would find an unexpected card had turned up, this deal!

The church clocks began to strike twelve, some near, some far, and presently St. Botolph's, clanging loud and close. In the midst of the

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strokes there was a thump at the front door. Startling for the moment, but only a policeman testing the fastenings. His receding tramp was quite clear, now that the clocks had ceased to strike.

Mr. Marks was very slow, and more than once Snorkey was in danger of falling asleep. He was listening for the stroke of one, and wondering if he might already have missed it by dozing, when at last there came the expected click in the lock, and with extraordinary suddenness Marks was in the shop with the door closed behind him. Plainly he must have been watching his opportunity, and had reached the door and turned the familiar lock swiftly and quietly. And in another moment he was groping in the back room, within two yards of his visitor.

Snorkey felt for his matches and his lantern; but as he did so a match was struck in the middle of the room, and revealed Marks in the act of lighting a lantern of his own. Snorkey waited till the flame was well established and the lantern closed, and then said cheerfully: "Ah! good mornin', Mr. Marks!"

With a bounce and a faint yelp Mr. Marks sprang back against a pile of boxes, livid and gasping, with a terrified whimper in his throat.

"All right, Mr. Marks! Don't jump! It's only me! Quite a old friend!" And Snorkey lifted the lantern and held it by the side of his

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face, whereon flickered something vastly like a grin.

"Vat d'you—d'you vant?" gasped Marks, panting with the shock. "Vat d'you vant?"

"Want to give meself up," answered Snorkey crisply. "Burglary—breakin' an' enterin';—I'm a 'orrid criminal. I broke in."

Marks gulped twice before he got a word out. "You broke in?" he repeated.

"Burglariously busted your back window, an' been waitin' 'ere about an hour an' a 'alf to confess. I've repented."

"You—you—vat?"

"I've repented. Anybody would as didn't come for shavings. If I'd wanted shavings I'd ha' made a good stroke o' business to-night; shavings or waste paper, or paraffin. Not wantin' 'em, I've repented. Lock me up."

Mr. Marks clapped his hand distractedly to the side of his head. "You go—go away!" he said.

Snorkey shook his head, put down the lantern, and sat on the edge of the table. "Couldn't think of it," he said. "Couldn't think o' goin' away now, after all the wickedness I've committed. My conscience wouldn't stand it. You fetch the p'lice an' 'ave me punished proper."

Mr. Marks looked up and down the room and towards the shop and up the stairs, thoughtfully. The shock of surprise was passing, like me; anyhow, it seems a bit 'ard this time.

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to be succeeded by a desperate perplexity.

"All right," he said at length. "I don't want to punish you. You can go."

"No, no," Snorkey replied cordially. "Don't you let your feelin's get worked on, Mr. Marks. You dunno what a 'orrid chap I've bin. O' course, I've repented now, but that was only 'cos of the shavings. You can't rightly count a repentance 'cos of shavings—not by the proper rules."

"Go along," answered Marks, with a furtive lowering of voice. "I tell you I von't say noddin' about it. Ve understand each other."

Snorkey shook his head. "I doubt it, Mr. Marks," he sighed. "It ain't easy for a gent like you to understand a thorough wrong 'un like me; anyhow, it seems a bit 'ard this time. You don't mean to say you forgive me—goin' to take mercy on me?"

"Yes. Go on."

"Mr. Marks, you're a nobleman. I'm willin' enough. I can be took mercy on, on very reasonable terms. My little—er—commission, as you might say, for bein' forgiven, ought to be about fifty quid, I should say, this time."

"Vat?"

"Fifty quid, I said. You see, it wants rather a lot o' forgiveness for a burglary as wicked as this. The drawers in your safe's all bent anyhow, an' your first-floor back window's quite shockin'."

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"You've got a fine cheek," snarled Mr. Marks, by this time much recovered. "Vy you expect me to pay anyting? You're lucky not to be took up!"

"What I said meself!" replied Snorkey. "Fetch the p'lice. Or I'll go an' fetch 'em if you like."

"No, no! But fifty quid's ridic'luth! Besides, I got no money here!"

"All right; I'll wait here for it till the mornin'. It's warmer 'ere than out in the cold unfeelin' streets."

"No, no! You must go! Now, come, be reathonable, Mr. Thnorkey. I'll see you to-morrow an' make it all right. Tholemn vord I vill!"

Snorkey winked, and shook his head inexorably. "You don't understand the wicked feelin's of a 'ardened criminal, Mr. Marks. D'ye know, I'm sunk that low I wouldn't take your word for it! I wouldn't! Shockin', ain't it?"

"But fifty's out o' reathon! It'th abthurd!"

"Well, beat me down, Mr. Marks. Offer me forty."

"No, no—ridic'luth. I've got a quid vid me; p'r'aps thirty bob."

"Ridic'lous, too, ain't it? Why, I've broke the point of a tool as is worth as much as that. And if I 'adn't turned up, the place might 'a' bin afire! It might, the dangerous way things like paraffin is left about! It might 'a' broke out any minute if it 'adn't 'bin for me."

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"I'll give ye five quid, come!"

"Can't be done at the price. My conscience won't allow it; it's a special good conscience, is mine! It comes a lot dearer than that."

"But ven I've got no more, vat can I do?"

"Just now you 'adn't got no more than thirty bob; now it's growed to five quid. If I stop 'ere you'll be a millionaire by the mornin', Mr. Marks, Exquire, an' all through me. I'll stop."

"No, no; be a thport, Mr. Thnorkey, an' give a man a chance. Vat'll you take—reathonable?"

"Ah, you see it's growed a bit more a'ready. I said it would. You'd better let me stop, for your own sake. But if you'd really rather not, why, I think I can make a better guess at what you've got on you than you can yourself. If you've got five quid, an' a bit more, on ye it means you 'aven't took your winnin's home from the club yet. You always change the silver afore you come away, I know. I guess twenty quid. If there's more—why, you can keep it for your honesty. But that's my charge—ab-so!"

Time was going, and as a fact the sum in Mr. Mark's pockets was well above his tormentor's estimate. He thought for a moment, looked into Snorkey's eyes with a gaze of agonized reproach, turned his back, and counted out the money in gold. Then he turned again with a sigh and paid it over.

"He seemed quite out o' temper payin' over that little bit," Snorkey said, long afterward,

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relating the adventure. "Quite rusty 'e was. 'Adn't got what you might call a sense of 'umor, I s'pose. Some people ain't. But I told 'im very cheerful to be careful about strikin' matches an' such, with all them com—combustious things about, an' I come away.

"I come down the street, an' turned into Houndsditch, an' there what should I see but a fire-alarm post. You know where it is—just at the corner. Well, you know, I felt a bit nervous about Mr. Marks. It was a dangerous kind o' place for anybody to be about in with a light, an' somehow I 'ad a 'orrid sort o' presentiment that the 'ouse might catch afire after all. You know the way one o' them presentiments gets 'old of you, sometimes. Well, this 'ere one 'o mine was that strong that I took my chance with the alarm. I smashed the glass, an' I tugged the 'andle till I very near tugged it out, an' then I ran 'ome fast, 'cos it was late.

"An' the most re-markable co-in-cidence about the 'ole thing was—when the fire-engines got round there, there *was* a fire! There was, on my solemn davy! Wasn't it wonderful? An' Mr. Marks got in sich a muddle explainin' 'ow the accident 'appened that they gave him two years hard!"

THE COPPER CHARM

OF the relics of Cunning Murrell, the wise man of Essex, I have seen many, and I own some—his books of conjuration and geomancy, scores of his written horoscopes; and of his actual implements of magic I have seen the famous glass by which he, or anybody else, was enabled to see through a brick wall. This amazing instrument gained him vast consideration and authority among the unlearned of Essex up to and beyond the middle of the nineteenth century, but matter-of-fact examination, at a time when Cunning Murrell was altogether too dead to prevent it, robbed the wonder of all its mystery. For indeed, it was nothing but a simple arrangement of the mirrors in a wooden case, such as a schoolboy might make for himself with a little patience and the ruins of a shaving-glass. But it served its turn well, and it was by this and other such aids that Murrell became, and remained to his life's end, something like absolute sovereign of all Essex outside the great houses.

But there was another instrument, or talk of it at least, of far stranger purport. There was talk of it still, twenty years and more after its reputed possessor was gathered to his fathers

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and his twenty-one children in Hadleigh churchyard. This was said to be nothing less than a strange disc of dull copper, by aid whereof Cunning Murrell could distinguish the true man from the liar. For the liar might stare at it till his eyes were sore, yet never could he see in it anything but its mere material self—a round plate of common dull copper; while it was the peculiar virtue of an honest man's eyes to perceive on the dim surface *something*—something of which only Cunning Murrell had the secret; something which the gazer must declare to him as proof and test of his truth. But of what that something was nobody could tell a word; for indeed it would seem that nobody had ever seen it. And yet belief in its existence was wide as Essex; though there has been a suspicion that the whole report was the invention of that squinting humorist, Dan Fisk. For he had a deal to do with the only tale of the charm I know.

In those days Hadleigh Fair occurred once a year, on Midsummer Day. Rochford Market was held once a week, on Thursday. On Rochford Market night the neighboring roads carried many convivial home-goers by horse, dog-cart wagon, and foot; on Hadleigh Fair night there was far greater conviviality and many more convivia. But when Hadleigh Fair fell on the same day as Rochford Market (as needs it must in some years) then the resulting jollity was as

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the square of Hadleigh hilarity plus the cube of Rochford revelry, involved to the *n*th power, and a great deal more involved than that, too, if you can believe it.

It was on one of these days of joyous coincidence that Abel Pennyfather gave Joe Barstow and Elijah Weeley a lift to Rochford Market in his cart, and so made occasion for this appeal to Murrell's talisman.

Hadleigh Fair grew active at seven in the morning; so that there had been seven hours of it ere Abel Pennyfather's cart set out at two in the afternoon. Seven hours of Hadleigh Fair and its overwhelming gooseberry pie! For it was the gooseberry pie, crown and symbol of Hadleigh Fair, that made the anniversary formidable to the human constitution. It was the property of this potent confection to cause many with whom it disagreed to fall asleep in ditches, and others to penetrate into the wrong houses on all-fours. An extraordinary unsteadiness of the legs, widely prevalent on fair day, had been distinctly traced to gooseberry pie by many expert victims, and a certain waviness of outline in Hadleigh scenery could be attributed to nothing else.

So that after several hours of Hadleigh Fair, and a long monotony of gooseberry pie, it struck Joe Barstow and Elijah Weeley that a visit to Rochford Market would make a welcome

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change. Abel Pennyfather's cart offered the opportunity, and that opportunity, embodied and made visible in the tailboard, Joe Barstow seized with both hands; after which, with no difficulty beyond the temporary delay caused by Elijah Weeley's mistaken attempt to haul himself aboard by Joe's leg, the journey began.

Of the events of that journey, the "faites and gestes" of Joe and Elijah at Rochford Market, who shall tell? Pass rather to the return of Abel Pennyfather, light laden and heedless, driving his white mare as of old drove the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, pounding the road to Hadleigh in the cool of the evening, and destined to make near such a stir at the Castle Inn as did his fore-runner at Jezreel. For at that same Castle Inn he descended from his perch, dropped the tailboard, and proceeded in due order to tug at the two sleeping figures within. With the natural protest of grunts and gasps the sleepers presently emerged, and were presented erect to society—in the persons of Reuben Turner and young Sim Cloyse.

"What's this?" cried Abel Pennyfather, staring aghast. "'Tis witchcraft, an' nothin' else! They was Joe Barstow an' 'Lijah Weeley when they got in; an' that I'll swear 'pon oath!"

Friends gathered to inspect the phenomenon, and agreed that Reuben Turner and Sim Cloyse were certainly Reuben and Sim now, whoever

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they may have been earlier in the day. And, although Abel protested with increasing vehemence that they were indisputably Joe and Elijah when he put them in the cart at Rochford, Reuben and Sim declared, with equal confidence, that they had never been anybody but themselves all day. Wherein the neighbors were disposed to agree with them, arguing that a man who had been some one else would probably be the first to know it and the last to be mistaken about it. But the greater the majority against him the more positive Abel Pennyfather grew; and the discussion waxed prodigiously for a time, till there arrived Jobson of Wickford, very angry, and many miles out of his way home, driving his own horse in the shafts of Abel Pennyfather's cart, with Joe Barstow and Elijah Weeley in it; neither of them, strictly speaking, awake, after the fatigues of the day.

"Couldn't you see they'd putt the 'osses to the wrong carts?" shouted Jobson to the amazed Pennyfather. "I've a-been chasing yow arl the way from Rochford!"

"Glory be!" gasped Abel, "an' so they hev! Now that comes o' standin' they two carts side by side on sich a troublesome confusin' day. I putt them chaps in behind in *my* cart and I walked round they two carts twice, careful and absent-minded as I be, afore I stopped agin my oad white mare. 'Come up, oad gal,' says I, an'

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I took the reins off her an' got up an' druv home without another thought."

"No," retorted Jobson of Wickford, still very angry. "I count a thought ain't a treat you often hev. Can't you help with the harness now I hev found 'ee?"

But the most of the intelligence present was in a state of suspension, not to say paralysis, in face of the novelty of the adventure; soaring, at any rate, in regions far from any matter of Jobson's harness. The one or two most distinguished for presence of mind were turning their faculties toward the rousing and hauling forth of Joe Barstow and Elijah Weeley, when another object was perceived in the cart.

"Why," said one, "here be a gallon jar. Is is yourn, Master Jobson?"

"No," snapped Jobson, wrenching at a buckle, "'taren't. More mistakes, I count—I've a-been cartin' a wuthless load as don't belong to me."

"Is't yours, Abel?" pursued the inquirer.

"No, that it ben't," replied Abel Pennyfather, not yet capable of sagacious reflection. It was an answer which he never ceased to regret for the rest of his life; for as Joe and Elijah rose, cramped and blinking, Dan Fisk, having removed the cork and temporarily substituted his nose, cried aloud: "Why, 'tis rum, surely!"

At the words Joe Barstow and Elijah Weeley were suddenly wide awake, ready, prudent, and

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unanimous. A hand of each fell simultaneously on the jar as Dan restored the cork, and the vessel was drawn to a loving embrace between them. It was a touching action, and signified to the dullest intelligence that the gallon jar was homeless no longer.

"Thank 'ee, Joe," said Elijah, "I'll take that jar now."

"Never mind," replied Joe; "I count I can carry it myself."

"I wouldn't dream of it," protested Elijah, politely. "My house is only jist round the corner."

"I ain't goin' there," retorted Joe, not so politely.

"No need, me bein' goin' to take it myself."

"Take what yourself?"

"My rum."

"*Your* rum? Oh well, you can take it where you like, any as you've got. This here's mine."

"Yours? Why, Joe Barstow, you ben't awake yet; you're dreaming."

"I count I'm awake enough to know my own property. You let go."

"'Taren't likely I'd make a mistake about my own freehold jar o' rum, is it, neighbors?" protested Elijah, maintaining his grip. "Joe, you're dreaming, I tell 'ee."

"If I'm a-dreamin'," retorted Joe, doggedly, "then I'm a-dreamin' this 'ere's my jar, an' the

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dream's comin' true. An' if a man haven't a right to the furnitude of his own dreams, who hev, eh? That's law and logic too, I count."

"If you come to speak of the law," interposed Abel Pennyfather, hoping to repair his early error, "the jar bein' found in my cart, an' me that absent-minded, I'm none so sure——"

"No, you ain't," interrupted Joe, promptly; "but I am. Elijah an' me both know better than that. *His* mistake's sayin' it's his, an' not knowin' where he bought it!"

"Bought it?" repeated Elijah, plainly a little startled. "Who says I dunno where I bought it? I bought it—I bought it——"——he glanced wildly about him for a moment——"bought it at the Red Cow."

"You may have bought *a* gallon o' rum at the Red Cow. I ain't denyin' it—you look as though you had, I count; but you den't bring it home in this here jar. I got this—got this here—got it from a friend—off the price of a pig he owed me for."

And now Dan Fisk interposed, as sportsman and humorist, watchful to allow no fun to evaporate unprofitably, and eager to tend, stimulate, and inflame it and to improve its flavor. So, with his beaming red face and his coruscating squint, he faced each disputant in turn, representing the scandal of a public row, and the

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advantages of a private investigation by friends of both parties in the Castle Inn parlor.

Whereupon Joe and Elijah, with the jar of rum between them and dividing them, physically and morally, Abel Pennyfather and Jobson of Wickford, Dan Fisk, and several more, turned into the Castle parlor, where Dan Fisk opened proceedings by snatching the jar and standing it in the middle of the table.

"There be the article in dispute," he proclaimed, "and here be we all a-gathered round it to see fair. Joe Barstow an' 'Lijah Weeley be the disputatious claimants, an' to one o' they two 'tis alleged that jar belongs."

"Hem!" coughed Pennyfather, tentatively. "'Twould seem so, at fust sight, as you might say; though bein' found in my cart, an' me——"

"Joe Barstow and 'Lijah Weeley be the candidates," proceeded Dan, ignoring Abel, "both on 'em havin' bought this here jar o' rum, as they distinctly tell us 'emselves, or as distinctly as sarcumstances allow. 'Lijah Weeley, he bought it off a red cow, and Joe Barstow, he took it off a friendly pig."

"Took it off a friend," grunted Joe, doggedly suspicious.

"The pig were a friend o' Joe's," pursued Dan, "an' as to the red cow, no doubt——"

"I said *at the Red Cow*," interrupted Elijah, sulkily—"Red Cow Inn."

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"O-ho!" exclaimed Dan, turning on him suddenly, "that be't, eh? Red Cow Inn? An' where be the Red Cow Inn at Rochford, eh?"

"Eh? Rochford?"

"Ah, I don't call to mind any Red Cow at Rochford. What Red Cow?"

Elijah Weeley stared blankly. "Maybe I'm thinkin' o' somewhere else," he said, rubbing his ear with his palm. "There's a Red Cow at Burnham, surely."

"Ah, but you haven't been near Burnham, to-day, you know. I'm beginning to doubt your remembrance o' that rum."

"'Taren't his, I tell 'ee," growled Joe Barstow. "I took it off a friend for a pig."

"Tell us the friend's name!" cried Dan, pouncing on Joe with a raised forefinger. "Out with his name—quick!"

Joe stared as blankly as Elijah. "Him?" he said slowly. "Oh—that there chap—you know; the one as—well, maybe not him, exactly, so to say, but a relation of his. That's the chap."

"O'course that's the chap—I've been a-thinkin' o' that chap, myself," Dan pursued, with a wider grin. "But what's his name? These here genelmen o' the jury are that unfriendly suspicious, they won't swallow the pig story wi'out the chap's name. What is it?"

Joe Barstow stared and sweated in an agony of mental travail. "Bill!" he burst out at length.

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"His name's Bill," repeated Dan, solemnly, turning to the company with an airy gesture and a bow of the gravest importance. "Joe's friend be the celebrated person o' the name o' Bill. A party with sich a name as that wouldn't bother to hev another, I suppose, Joe, would he?"

"I dunno," said Joe, sulkily. "That jar's mine, howsomdever; I *do* remember that."

"'Tis a comfort to know it, for a good memory's a great blessin'. Havin' that partikler blessin' by you, no doubt you remember the pig's birthday? Because 'tis the recollection o' this here honorable jury that your last latter o' pigs were all sold to Sam Prentice here in Hadleigh."

"That jar o' rum's mine, I tell 'ee," repeated Joe, fiercely dogged.

"An' you aren't no more sartin about the pig than 'Lijah Weeley about the cow?"

"I'm sartin' 'tis my rum," growled Joe. And Elijah Weeley, gathering courage, broke in again.

"Touchin' the Red Cow," he said, "that be a pardonable mistake anybody might make, fair day an' all, after a nap. An' now 'tis brought to my mind there *was* a pig in the business, but 'twere a pig *I* bought at Rochford market this very day. An' howsomdever it came about bein' hard to explain at sich short notice, 'taren't no mistake when I say, in round numbers, that rum's mine."

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"S'posin' that's so," queried Dan, "how would you treat all your friends here in regard to that rum?"

Elijah Weeley glanced at the crowd about him with some uneasiness. "Oh!" he said airily, "I'd give a friend a glass, o' course."

"I'd give all my friends two glasses," exclaimed Joe, bidding like a politician, but with the wildest miscalculation of the jar's capacity.

"Well, well," said Elijah. "When I said a glass I was a-puttin' of it figuratively, as you might say. I'd do the han'some thing, surely."

"Then this here trouble's settled," proclaimed Dan Fisk. "Takin' it as the jar belongs to either one o' you, and you're both ekally horspitable—well, here's all your mutual friends, an' we've on'y got to order in the glasses *and* the water, an' the dispute passes away harmonious along o' the rum."

The rivals received this amiable proposal with uneasy indignation, and joined forces against it instantly.

"Certainly not!" said Elijah.

"Not me!" said Joe.

"Why not?" demanded Dan.

"'Twouldn't be proper," said Elijah.

"Course not," agreed Joe.

"If I stood drinks out o' my jar," explained Elijah, "Joe Barstow 'ud go an' say it was his treat."

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"An' if I treated my friends out o' my jar," pursued Joe, "'Lijah Weeley 'ud go arl over Essex a-bragging as he'd stood drinks round—a thing he never did in his life."

With that the proceedings fell into riotous confusion and a conflict of a hundred suggestions, from which in a little while Dan Fisk once more emerged triumphant.

"There's nothin' for it, neighbors," he announced, "but Cunning Murrell. Cunning Murrell an' his copper charm'll settle this. Nobody here can tell whether Joe or 'Lijah is tellin' truth, least of all Joe and 'Lijah 'emselves, after such a busy fair-day. We'll take 'em now to look at Master Murrell's copper charm, an' see which be the truth-teller."

The suggestion was received with general favor, except, oddly enough, by the claimants themselves, who began, with uneasy alarm and much labor, to invent the beginnings of objections and excuses. But they and their objections were swept away together by the enthusiasm of the majority, who—feeling by now some proprietary interest in the rum—were quite willing to add the further interest of a performance of Murrell's necromancy, at no expense to themselves. Wherefore, the whole company, with Dan Fisk and the jar at their head, emerged into the street, now dark, and turned into the lane where stood Cunning Murrell's cottage.

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The way was short—eighty yards, perhaps—though long enough to produce a change in the demeanor of the company, which, starting hilarious, tailed out and quieted, and at last halted before Murrell's door in respectful silence. For that was the manner of all toward the witchfinder, and indeed a large part of the grin had vanished even from Dan Fisk's face as he clicked the latch.

Murrell himself opened the door, and stood, small and gray and severe, on the threshold, demanding the meaning of the visit. The little room behind him, lighted by a solitary candle and hung thick with bunches of dried herbs, was a fitting background—the most mysterious chamber in the little world of South Essex.

Dan Fisk posed the jar on his knee and explained the dispute, though now with something short of his native facetiousness.

Cunning Murrell heard him through, and then said sharply: "So now you come to ask o' my curis arts which o' they men be sayin' truth? With a copper charm you hear of?"

"Aye, Master Murrell, sir; as 'tis said, sir."

The old man gazed for a moment hard and sharp in Dan Fisk's face. Then he said: "Come you two in," and turned into the room.

There was a scuffling of feet, and Murrell turned again. "Not all o' that rabble," he said.

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" 'Tis Joe Barstow an' Elijah Weeley I want, an' Dan Fisk. Give me that jar."

Joe and Elijah lumbered sheepishly in, each propelled by a hand of Dan. Cunning Murrell took something from a drawer in a dark corner, and, without looking at it, extended it behind him as he shut the drawer.

"Take you the charm first, Elijah Weeley," he said. "Take it in your hand an' carry it to the light."

Elijah took a small disc of copper, convex on its brighter side, and held it near the candle on the mantelpiece. Murrell stood apart, gazing on the floor, with his hand across his forehead.

"Look you on the metal very close, Elijah Weeley," he said. "D'ye see anything?"

"Oh, aye, yes, Master Murrell, sir," answered Elijah, his face within an inch of the object, and his eyes protruding half the distance. "Aye, Master Murrell. Stands to reason I can see it—'tis natural I should."

"And why natural?"

"Why, Master Murrell? Why, 'cos 'tis my rum, you see."

"Oh, that be your reason, eh? Well, an' what is't you see?"

"What is't, Master Murrell, sir?"

"Aye, what is it?"

"Oh, it's a—a—what you might call a sort o' peculiar kind o' thing, so to say. Very peculiar."

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"Ah, I make no doubt o' that," the old man replied, with ungenial tone. "Describe that peculiar thing, Elijah Weeley," he added, still gazing on the floor.

"That, sir—that, Master Murrell, is easier said than done as you might say, not meanin' no harm, sir. But stands to reason I can see it, Master Murrell, consekens 'o that bein' my rum. That's argyment, now, ain't it?"

"Aye, 'tis argyment, but not information. If you can see it, Elijah Weeley, tell me what 'tis you see. Is it like a horse, for instance?"

"Well, sir, as to that, Master Murrell, 'tis most likely you'd be right, sir, ben't it?"

"Aye, it is, Elijah Weeley. Go on."

"Why, sir, that bein' so, sir, Master Murrell, sir, you *be* right an' most wonderful scientific, sartin to say, an' now I come to look at it 'tis most powerful like a hoss—quite wonderful; more like than most real hosses, as you might say."

"Wonderful! Elijah Weeley—wonderful! Give Joe Barstow the charm. Can you see a hoss, Joe Barstow?"

"Aye, yes, Master Murrell, sartenly," answered that politician eagerly, almost before he had snatched the charm. "Two on 'em!" he proceeded bidding higher again. "Two on 'em, with saddles!"

"With saddles?" exclaimed Murrell, raising

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his eyes and reaching Joe in a stride. "*Saddles?* What's this yôu're looking at, Joe Barstow?"

"Lookin' at? Why, the charm, Master Murrell, sir! The charm!"

"The charm? That? Why, 'tis the lid o' my darter's copper kettle, put by for a new rim an' handle! I must ha' took it by mistake. An' you saw hosses in it! Two hosses with saddles! 'Twould seem to me this here kettle lid be as good a charm as any with the likes o' you, Joe Barstow an' Elijah Weeley. It tell plain enough that you be liars both! An' 'tis a kettle-lid! Hosses and saddles. Oh, 'tis shameful to reflect on the depravity of the age! To think that two grown men should walk about the face of this earth with lies that any kettle-lid can contradict!"

Terrible in his righteous wrath, the old man shook his head in the cowed faces of Joe and Elijah, seized the jar of rum, pushed it into a cupboard, and locked the door on it.

"After what I've larned of you, I misdoubt much how you came by that jar," he said, "an' 'twould be abettin' your wickedness to let it out o' my charge; an' so I do my duty, in face o' the wickedness o' these times. Take them two out with you, Dan Fisk; I want no such characters as them in my house!"

This was certainly the last occasion on which anybody had the temerity to inquire for the

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copper charm. And it was months ere the jar was seen again; when it was observed to be a jar of rum no longer; for Cuning Murrell was using it to carry horse medicine, a thing in which he drove a thriving trade.

DOBBS'S PARROT

BILL WRAGG, dealer in dogs, birds, and guinea-pigs, began business in the parrot line, with a capital of nothing and no parrots. The old rascal hinted so much when I got from him the tale of his champion terrier, Rhymer the Second, which you may read elsewhere. But I observed for long a certain reluctance to talk with any particularity of this affair of parrot-dealing. From this I judged that it must have been a transaction of uncommon—well, say acumen—even for Bill Wragg; and so I found it, when at last he made his confession.

“Beginnin’ business without capital,” said Bill Wragg, wiping his pipe with a red-spotted handkerchief, “is all a matter o’ credit, o’ course. Lots o’ people begin on credit, an’ do very well; an’ different people get their credit different ways. I begun on credit, an’ I got my credit from perfick strangers, quite easy.

“I was frightful ’ard up, just then—stony-broke, in fact. I’d been lookin’ out for odd jobs ’ere an’ there, an’ gettin’ precious few of ’em. Last job I’d had was down Wappin’ way, givin’

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a hand at a foreign animal shop, where the reg'lar chap was away ill. The guv'nor, he give me a suit o' clothes to begin with, 'cause he said mine 'ud disgrace the shop, an' so they would. The new clothes wasn't new altogether—a sailor-bloke had died in 'em a fortnight afore, at a crimp's; but they was all right, an' I took it mighty generous o' the guv'nor, till the end o' the week, an' then 'e stopped 'em out o' my wages. Well, I'd been gone away from that job a long time, an' there didn't seem another job to be had; so, bein' stony-broke, as I just said, I thought I might as well set up for myself.

"It was the clothes that give me the idea to begin with—them bein' of a seafarin' sort; just the sort o' things a man might wear as was bringin' 'ome a parrot. An' what put the idea into movin' shape was me passin' a little coal-office—one o' them little shanties where a clerk sits all day to take orders. I knew that place, consequence of a friend o' mine 'avin' done a little business there about a dawg with the clerk; it was a careless bit o' business as might ha' got my friend in trouble, if the clerk 'adn't gone an' died almost at once. Well, this clerk's name was Dobbs, an' rememberin' that, I thought I see my way to raisin' a bit o' credit.

"I just went into the office all gay an' friendly, an' 'Good arternoon,' I says to the noo clerk. 'Good arternoon. Is Mr. Dobbs in?'

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“‘No,’ says he, ‘Mr. Dobbs is dead. Been dead six months.’

“‘*Dead?*’ says I. ‘What? *Dead?* My dear ol’ pal Dobbs? No, it can’t be true,’ I says.

“‘It is true,’ says the chap. ‘Anyway, I see the funeral, an’ I’ve got his job.’

“‘Well, now,’ I says, ‘whoever’d a’ believed it? Poor ol’ Dobbs! When I went on my last voyage I left him as well an’ arty as ever I see anybody! This is a awful shock for me,’ I says.

“‘The clerk was rather a dull-lookin’ sort o’ chap, with giglamps, an’ he just nodded his head.

“‘Quite a awful shock,’ I says. ‘Why, I brought ’ome a parrot for ’im! A lovely parrot—talks like a—like a angel, an’ whistles any toon you like. I come here to see him about it! It’s a awful shock.’

“‘Yes,’ says Giglamps, ‘it was rather sudden.’

“‘Sudden ain’t the word,’ I says; ‘it’s positive catastrophageous. An’ what am I to do with that beautiful parrot? I can’t take it away with me; the new skipper wouldn’t stand it—’e’s a terror. Besides I couldn’t bear to be reminded of poor ol’ Dobbs every time I see ’is lovely plomage or ’eard ’im talk—talks just like Dan Leno, does that bird. What am I to do with it? I’m a lonely sort o’ chap, an’

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haven't got a soul in the world to give it to, now poor old Dobbs is gone. If I only knowed a nice kind 'ome for it, I'd—but hold on,' I says, all of a sudden, 'how about you? Will you have it? Eh? I don't believe *you'd* treat such a 'andsome bird unkind, would you? I'll give 'im to *you*, an' welcome, if you'll take care of 'im. 'E's a valuable bird, too, but o' course, I don't want to make money out of 'im. Come, you shall have him!'

"I could see old Giglamps was gettin' interested, thinkin' he was in for a 'andsome present. 'Hem!' he says, 'it's very kind of you, an' of course I'll have the bird with pleasure, an' take every care of him; very kind of you indeed, I'm sure it is.'

"'That's all right,' I says, 'it's nothing to me, so long as pore Peter gets a good 'ome. Peter's his name,' I says. 'I'll go an' fetch him along 'ere. Got a cage?'

"'Why, no,' says he, 'I ain't got a cage.'

"'Must 'ave a cage,' says I. 'The one he's in now don't belong to me. Must 'ave a cage. What are you going to do about it?'

"'I dunno,' says Giglamps, lookin' 'elpless.

"'A good parrot cage comes a bit dear, to buy new,' I says. 'But there's a fine second-hand one you might get cheap just over in Walworth. I'll mind the office while you go.'

"'No,' he says, 'I can't leave the place.' Of

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course, I knowed that well enough—it was part o' the game. 'I can't leave the place,' says he. 'I s'pose *you* couldn't see about it?'

'Well,' says I, thoughtful like, 'I'm a bit busy, but p'raps I might. It's a fine cage, an' worth a price; but, properly managed, I might try and get it for five bob, though I expect it'll be more. Anyhow,' I says, 'give me the five bob, an' if I have to pay any more I'll trust you for it till I come back.'

"So I just puts out my hand casual, and in drops the five bob. So I went out that much to the good in credit."

Here I fear I exhibited something positively like a grin. "Credit or cash?" I queried.

"Credit, I said, sir," Bill replied, virtuously. "Cash an' credit's the same thing with a man o' business like me. I went out with that five bob, an' I put in threepence of it for a small drink that I wanted very bad arter bein' without so long. I had my drink, an' I thought things over, an' I made up my mind that ten bob was just twice as useful as five to start business with, and there was just such another office of the same coal company only a penny tram ride off, that might be good for another crown. So I took that penny tram ride, and found the other office. It was a much smarter, brisker lookin' chap at this place, I found; but I went at him the same way—askin' for Dobbs.

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“ ‘Dobbs?’ says the new chap. ‘No; he used to be up at the next office along the road there, but he’s dead now.’

“ ‘*Dead?*’ says I. ‘What, my old pal Dobbs?’ And I did it all over again for the new chap. I think the trouble was worth the money and more, but a man mustn’t be afraid o’ work when he’s beginnin’ business with no capital. So I did it all again very careful, an’ when I came to offerin’ him the parrot he was ready enough.

“ ‘Why, rather,’ he says, ‘I’ll have him. I’m very fond o’ birds. A parrot’s just what I want.’

“ ‘All right,’ says I, ‘you shall have him an’ welcome. I’ll fetch him along here.’ So I starts round to go, and pitches back the old question from the door. ‘Got a cage?’ says I.

“ ‘This time I got a bit of a surprise. ‘Cage?’ says he; ‘oh, yes—I’ve got a cage—got a stunner that belonged to my aunt. A parrot’s just what I wanted to put in it. Here it is.’

“ ‘An’ he went into the little cubby-hole at the back an’ dragged out a fust-rate brass cage as good as new. It wasn’t what I’d expected, a coincidence like that, but it don’t do to be took aback at little changes o’ luck. ‘All right,’ says I, ‘that’ll do.’ An’ I laid ’old o’ the cage an’ slung out with it.

“ ‘Some chaps mightn’t have the presence o’ mind for that, havin’ only the five bob in their minds, but a man o’ business is got to be ekal

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to anything as comes along, an' this 'ere cage was worth a sight more'n the five bob, anyhow. So there I was, a business man at large, with the rest o' five bob an' a fust-class brass parrot-cage, on credit, to begin business with.

"Well, the best parrot-cage in the world ain't complete without a parrot, so I see very well that the next move ought to be towards a bird o' that specie. I brought to mind a very nice one I'd often seen in a quiet road not very many streets away, one as belonged to a nice old lady, in a very nice 'ouse with a garden round it. I'd seen that parrot stood outside for an airin' o' fine afternoons, an' I hurried up now to get there before it was took in. You see the old gal hadn't got anything like so fine a cage as this brass one, an' I'd an idea her parrot an' my cage 'ud go together well. But it all depended, you see, on the old lady bein' in sight or not, whether my cage went outside 'er parrot—at a price—or 'er parrot went inside my cage, for nothin'. There'd be more business in the last arrangement, o' course, but you have to take the best you can get in these 'ard times.

"I hurried up, an' when I came to the place I see the parrot there all right, standin' outside on a garden chair. I just strolled in an' up the gravel path swinging the brass cage on my finger an' lookin' round for the old lady. I couldn't see her nor anybody else, so I went up to the

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parrot an' had a look at him. He was a fine 'andsome bird, an' the cage he had wasn't good enough for him, by a lot. It was just an ornery sort o' iron wire cage, half wore out, an' the fastenin' was pretty nigh droppin' off with rust. It was plain enough it was *my* cage that bird ought to be in, not a wore-out old thing like the one he'd got. I had a look round to make sure nobody was about, an' then I took 'old o' that rusty old catch an' it came open afore I could ha' winked."

"Surprising!" I interjected. "And then I suppose the parrot flew straight into the brass cage?"

"No, sir," Bill Wragg answered calmly, "you're s'posin' wrong. That wouldn't be a likely thing for it to do. I might ha' made it a bit more likely by shovin' the open door o' one cage agin the other, but that would ha' looked suspicious, an' I wasn't *quite* sure that somebody mightn't be a-peepin' from somewhere. Why, they might ha' thought I wanted to steal the bird! You'd scarcely believe 'ow suspicious people are. As it was, you see, it was nothin' but a accident as might have occurred to anybody. I was just bringing in a nice cage to sell, an' havin' a look at the old 'un while I was lookin' about for the lady."

"Yes, of course," I said, very solemnly. "Of course."

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“Well, sir, you’d hardly believe it, but that parrot no sooner found the door open than he flew out. Nothin’ to do with me, o’ course, but he did fly out, an’ quite properly I went arter him. I’d been the cause o’ the accident, you see, in a sort of indireck way, so I thought I ought to do what I could to catch the bird—only fair an’ proper. He flew out over the railings an’ down the road, an’ I went out the gate an’ trotted down the road after him. He ’lighted fust on a tree at the corner, so I let fly a stone an’ started him off a’ that, an’ away he went down the side street an’ along another turnin’.

“After that it was plain sailin’—all but the actual ketchin’ of ’im. You can pretty easy keep a parrot in sight—he takes a rest somewhere every fifty yards or so. Nobody hadn’t noticed in the quiet streets, but as soon as we got out a bit into the traffic the crowd got bigger every second, all huntin’ the parrot, an’ all ready to give ’im to me as soon as he was caught. ’Cause why? I dunno. I was just a-runnin’ after him with a open cage in my hand, that’s all. *I* never said he was my parrot. But everybody else kep’ sayin’ he was, an’ it’s a waste o’ time to start contradictin’ a crowd. So I kep’ well up in the mob, an’ kep’ a look-out in case the old lady should turn up, or one o’ them coal-office clerks. The crowd kep’ gettin’ bigger an’ bigger, an’ I got to be sich

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a celebrated an' conspikuous character I began to feel a bit uncomfortable about it. You wouldn't think there was such a lot o' fools about, ready to come crowdin' up an' shoutin' an' rousin' up the parish, just because of a parrot gettin' loose. O' course, I expected there'd be a bit of a crowd, but I hadn't looked for quite sich a row as this, an' I didn't want it, neither. 'There 'e is—that's 'im!' they was a-sayin'. 'That sea-farin' lookin' bloke with the empty cage; 'e's lost 'is parrot.' Celebrity an' fame's all very well in its place, but a man o' business, settin' up for 'isself on credit, like me, don't want too much of it at once. An' the wust of it was, that there redikulus parrot was a-workin' 'is way nearer an' nearer the main road, with the tram-lines on it an' them coal-offices one at each end, an' the 'ole neighborhood turnin' out as we went along.

"But nothin' lasts for ever, an' in the end he 'lighted on the sill of a attic winder at a corner 'ouse o' the main road, an' a slavey that was in the attic, she claps a towel over him an' stands there screamin' at the winder for fear he might peck through the towel.

"'All right, miss,' I sings out; "'old tight! He won't bite! I'm a-comin'.'

"So they lets me in the front door, civil as butter, an' I goes up to the attic, an' in about half a quarter of a minute pretty Polly was

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inside the brass cage, as 'andsome an' suitable as you please. I told the slavey she was the smartest an' prettiest gal I'd seen since fust I went a-sailin' on the stormy ocean, an' 'ow I wished I was a bit younger an' 'andsomer myself, for 'er sake, so it didn't cost me nothin'; which was a bit o' luck, for I'd been countin' on havin' to fork out a bob to somebody for collarin' that bird.

"Well, the crowd began to melt a bit when I came out, the excitement bein' over, but I didn't like the look o' things much, so I made up my mind I'd get the job over as soon as I could. I didn't know when the old lady might turn up, an' though o' course I was only tryin' to ketch her parrot for her, what had got out accidental, things might 'a' looked suspicious. Not but what, o' course, anybody could see that if I'd been a thief I'd 'a' walked off with the bird an' cage an' all to begin with. A proper man o' business allus arranges things like that, for fear of accidents. Men o' business as ain't clever enough to manage it is nothin' but dishonest persons, an' liable to be took up.

"There was a fine big pub across the road, at a corner a little farther down—sich a fine pub that it was an hotel, with a proper hotel entrance at one side, with plants in tubs an' red carpets. It looked a sort o' place that could afford a price, so I went in—not the hotel en-

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trance, but just the other side, where there was a choice of three or four bar compartments. I went in the private bar, an' got on to the landlord straight away as soon as I'd ordered a drink.

" 'I wanted that drink,' I says, 'arter the chase I've 'ad for this parrot. Not but what he ain't worth it—I don't b'lieve you could match a parrot like that, not in the Z'logical Gardens. I meant him for my dear ol' pal Dobbs at the coal office along the road, as you might ha' known afore he died. When I 'eard the sad news, I thought I'd take 'im up to Leaden'all Market an' sell 'im; 'e's worth ten quid of anybody's money, is that bird, an' the cage 'ud be cheap at a couple. But I managed to let him loose—my fault, through fiddlin' with the catch o' the cage door. An' 'e's led me such a dance it'll be too late for me to git up to the market now.'

"The parrot had been a-straightenin' of his feathers out an' makin' himself tidy arter the scramble an' just at this very moment he gives a sort o' little grumble to himself an' then raps out 'Pretty Poll! Hullo! Shut up!'

" 'Hear him talk!' I says. 'He'll go on like that all day an' say anything you please. What an ornament he'd be to this 'andsome bar o' yours! People'd come a-purpose to see him. Come,' I says, 'You shall have him for five pound, cage an' all! How's that?' says I.

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“Well, the landlord seemed quite on to buy him, though o’ course he wouldn’t do it without a haggle—’twasn’t likely. But arter a bit we settled it at three quid, an’ he handed over the jemmies. An’ cheap it was, too. So he stood the cage up on the top o’ where a partition joined the bar-screen, where everybody could see him, an’ said he’d have a proper shelf made for him to-morrow. I didn’t hang about much arter that, you may guess. But as soon as I got into the street, who should I see but the clerk from the coal office, the one that had sprung the five bob, talking to a chap as was pointin’ to the pub. Of course, the first thing I thought of was a bolt, but afore I could make up my mind he caught sight o’ me. So up I went as bold as brass.

“‘Hullo,’ says I, ‘that there parrot o’ yours is led me a pretty dance. Got out o’ the cage an’ kep’ me all the afternoon chasin’ him.’

“‘Yes,’ says old Giglamps, ‘I wondered where you’d got to, but when I shut the office I heard about a parrot bein’ lose, an’ that man told me you’d brought it in here.’

“‘Quite right,’ says I, ‘an’ so I did. Come in yourself, an’ see it. But the cage ain’t settled for yet,’ I says, ‘an’ it’ll cost you five bob more at least; though the chap’s askin’ even more’n that.’

“So I led him into the compartment on one

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side o' the partition, an' showed him the bird in the cage.

" 'What are you goin' to stand?' says I. 'You can see what sort of a cage it is—two quid's nearer its real price than ten bob.'

"Old Giglamps calls for whisky an' soda for two, an' says 'Pretty Polly' to the bird, same as what any customer might do, an' then he hands me over another five bob.

" 'I think he'll take ten bob,' says I, 'an' I'll just run round an' see if you'll wait here.'

"I was in an extra hurry, you see, for very good reason. He was sittin' down, but I was standin' up an' keepin' a weather eye on the street outside; an' there who should I see, starin' up at the pub front, but the clerk from the *other* coal office! What ho, thinks I, this tale o' the parrot hunt's got about an' things is warmin' up! So I skips out quick, an' ketches the chap by the arm.

" 'Hullo!' says he, 'what about that parrot?'

" 'Ain't you heard?' says I. 'He got out o' the cage an' led me no end of a dance. But he's all right,' I says, an' I led the chap off to another compartment away from his pal.

" 'I did hear about it,' says he, 'an' that's why I came here. I began to wonder where you'd got to.'

" 'All right,' says I, 'he's safe enough—I

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left him in charge of the landlord, an' I was a-comin' along arter you, 'cos I wanted to tell you something private. The fact is,' I says, whisperin' in his ear, 'the landlord's took a great fancy to that parrot. He's fair mad on it. O' course, the parrot's yours, an' you can sell it or not, just as you please. But if you *do* sell it, don't take less than ten pound, an' if you get ten pound—well, I think I ought to have a quid or two out of it, oughtn't I, seein' as I give you the bird? That's fair, ain't it?' says I.

" 'Yes,' says he, 'that's all right. If I get a tenner for it, I'll see you afterwards.'

" 'All right,' says I. 'You come in an' sit down, an' don't say nothing about it. You mustn't seem anxious to sell. I told the landlord I was goin' to see the owner an' I'll go round the back way an' talk him confidential into givin' a good price. You lie low till I give you the tip.'

"So he goes in an' sees his cage there all safe with the parrot in it, an' he orders his drink an' sits down quiet. I thought o' rushin' round into the private bar an' tellin' the landlord he was a chap comin' to offer a price for the bird, just to mix things up a bit while I got away. But when I got outside there was another surprise, s'elp me. It was just gettin' dusk, and there was the poor old lady as had lost her parrot, with a handkerchief over her head an' the

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cage in 'er 'and, comin' down the road disconsolate, lookin' up at the houses after her bird!

"When you've got a run o' luck, follow it up. That's my motto. It was a bit of a risk, but I skipped across the road an' said: 'Beg pardon, mum, but was you a lookin' for a parrot?'

"'Oh, yes,' she says. 'Have you seen it? If you'll only help me find my poor bird, I'll be *so* grateful! I didn't know he'd got out till I went to bring the cage in. Several people told me he'd come along this road an' been caught,' says she. 'Is that true? Do you know who's got him?'

"'Yes mum,' says I, 'I can put you on the track at once. Your parrot's in that public 'ouse opposite, havin' been took there by the man as caught it. I'll see about it for you, mum,' I says. 'You come across an' sit down in the hotel entrance, mum. It's quite respectable there, mum. The man what's got it is a low sort o' chap, mum—a coalheaver, name o' Dobbs, a-sit-*tin'* in the jug department. You can see your bird from the hotel entrance, mum, stood up on a partition. O' course, a rough feller like that Dobbs wouldn't be allowed in the hotel entrance an' a lady like you couldn't go into the jug department. *I'll* see about it. I expect he'll cut up rough an' want to claim the bird, mum, but *I'll* see you get your rights, mum!'

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“ ‘Oh, thank you,’ says the old gal, ‘I *shall* be so grateful if you will. I’ve been *so* distressed at the idea of losin’ my dear Polly! If you will get him back, I’ll be *most* grateful. Of course, I’ll pay a reward.’

“ ‘Jesso, mum,’ I says, ‘jesso. But not more’n half a sovereign. I’ll see you ain’t swindled, mum,’ I says. ‘That chap Dobbs ’ud be extortionate, but not a farden more’n half a sovereign, mum,’ says I, ‘if you’ll allow me to advise you. *I’ll* see to it for you, mum. You just sit down in the hotel entrance, mum, an’ give me the half-sovereign, an’ I’ll talk to him firm—firm. It’s the only way, with these low characters. I’ll talk to him firm, an’ mention the p’lice. *I’ll* see about it for you, mum!’

“So I sits the old gal down with her birdcage on the settee in the hotel entrance, takes her half-quid, an’—well, I left ’er there an’ hooked it round the first turnin’ an’ travelled straight ahead, fast, for the next half-hour.

“That made near four quid altogether, raised on credit. In my business a chap as can’t start very well on four quid ain’t fit to start at all, sir. I done very well, startin’ on credit, like I’m tellin’ you.”

“And you’ve never met any of your creditors since?” I asked.

“No, sir I ain’t. My business don’t seem to take me that way. It’s just a book debt,

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you see—just a book debt. *They* can't complain. What they was all arter—the two coal clerks, the landlord, an' the old lady—what they paid for, was nothin' but the parrot an' the cage, wasn't it? Well, and there it was for them, with them all round it. They couldn't expect more'n that, could they?"

For the first time during the story I could detect an indistinct chuckle from somewhere deep in Bill Wragg's throat.

"There's just one thing I was sorry for," he said; "but then you can't 'ave everything. I *should* 'a' liked to 'a' seen the shindy when them respectable parties got tired o' waitin', an' began to start in an' try to settle it all among 'em-selves! I'd almost 'a' give a quid back to 'ear 'ow they *did* settle it! But that 'ud be a luxury, an' a man o' business starting on credit can't afford luxuries!"

THE SELLER OF HATE

THERE is an English county of which it is said that the devil never entered it for fear of being put into a pie. At the moment I cannot remember which county it is, and know no more of it than to be certain it was not Essex, for all Essex pies are filled with much care, and are excellent. Nevertheless, it is the fact that in the old days, before he began building cheap villas, the devil very rarely came into Essex, and even now seldom ventures beyond the parts that they sell, by auction, in building lots. For the old Essex men were too hard for him, and the county bore him no luck. Everybody knows of his historic defeat at Barn Hall, and here I have the tale of his bad bargain at Cock-a-Bevis Hill.

It was some little time ago—some might not call it a little time: at any rate it was before all the improvements—that old Luke Hoddy lived in a cottage on the lower slope of Cock-a-Bevis Hill. It was so small a cottage that it might have been called a shed without slander, and a very lonely, sullen, smoky, frowning, ill-conditioned-looking shed it was, because it is the property of a house to proclaim its tenant's

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character, and Luke Hoddy was that sort of man. He was lonely, like his cottage, because he was sullen and frowning and ill-conditioned, like it also; and they both looked passing smoky because of neglect.

It might be venturing too far to say that Luke Hoddy was the most misanthropic man in the world, or even in all England. But certainly he must have been the most misanthropic man in all Essex, where men were all smiling, jolly, and pleasant together in the days when the devil feared their honest faces. Luke Hoddy not only hated his fellow men, but he kept pigs, and hated them; he also kept fowls, and hated them too. He detested the poor cottage wherein his poverty condemned him to live; he loathed the people who bought eggs of him, and so enabled him to live there; he abominated the children who bought apples from the tree in the garden, abominated them to such an extent that I cannot guess what sentiments he had left for the boys who stole them in the dusk. He abhorred the whole world, and everything in it. He was poor and ugly and old, and he resented each misfortune as though it were the personal and individual crime of every creature but himself. When he sold a fowl or a dozen eggs he did it with so evil a grace that he had to sell cheaper than anybody else, or keep his wares; and this was another reason for hating

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his customer. He hated the money he took, because it wasn't more; the eggs he sold, because he couldn't keep them; the hen that laid them, because there weren't thrice as many; the rest of the fowls, because they didn't care; and he was only glad of an order for one because he could kill it without losing money. If he could have wrung his customer's neck as cheaply, he would have done it with joy. To hate everybody better off than himself was part of his nature; and he hated the rest because they were so cheerful, comparatively. If you had given him a sackful of sovereigns he would have been your enemy for life, because they weren't guineas; and you would have deserved much worse for being such a fool.

At the close of a warm autumn day Luke Hoddy stood by his garden gate and scowled on all of the world that he could see. The sinking sun flung red gold along the fields and against the trees and hedges, and a little child sat to view the marvel, and to think wonderful things that it would long to recall in after life, and fail. But old Hoddy hated all the gold in the world that was not in his own pocket, where there was very little, and that little the only thing he loved. Children also he detested, for they were human beings. A stout, round-faced woman went down the path, with a baby on one arm and a basket on the other, and as she passed

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she called good-night. Luke flung back a savage growl, for this woman was a great aversion of his, being always happy, and all her life persistently sending more children to play on Cock-a-Bevis Hill. Then a girl came, driving cows, and a brown lad with her, and neither of them saw Luke Hoddy at all, because they were looking at each other. Luke positively snarled; and such a villainous twist remained on his face when they had passed, that a very small boy, who was coming hopefully up with a halfpenny gripped in his fist, greatly desiring an apple, turned and ran, and never stopped till he reached the goody-shop in the village; so that old Hoddy was the poorer by one halfpenny, and I am sorry it was no more.

The day waned, and people went on their way to rest from their work, old and young, men and women, and old Hoddy saw the world in little pass before his gate, and he hated it at large. Then there went the carrier, and after him Paigles, the farmer, on his cob.

Paigles was a notoriously poor farmer, and backward with his rent; it was more than believed, in fact, that his landlord would be glad to sell the farm and that way be quit of him, since he shrank from turning Paigles away from the land his great-grandfather had farmed a hundred years before him. Luke Hoddy grinned savagely at Paigles's back as it merged in the

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shadows of the trees. If only he had the money he would buy the farm, sell up Paigles, and fling him out, neck and crop. He would buy other people's houses, too, and treat them likewise. They hated him now, and if he had money, how he would grind their faces! He would grind their faces off their heads, if only he had the money.

It was at this favorable moment that the devil ventured out on Cock-a-Bevis Hill. He did not come flaming and raging, in a way to frighten folk, for to-night that was not his business; he came dressed very well and neatly, like a gentleman of those days, and it struck Luke Hoddy at the time that he looked rather like the lawyer at Witham. He wore trousers a little tighter than was usual—skin-tight, in fact—with straps. His swallow-tailed coat was pinched in very elegantly at the waist, and his beaver hat was broad in the crown and wide in the brim. He carried a quizzing-cane, and his black stock looked as though it must have gone a dozen times round his neck, on a collar that was half-way up his head behind. Still, notwithstanding this very respectable appearance, you must not suppose that Luke Hoddy mistook his visitor. Indeed, he recognized him at once; his beautifully varnished boots looked empty at the toes, and from time to time something vaguely disturbed the points of his elegant coat-tail: more-

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over, his eyes would have been enough, glowing there in the dark like dull coals.

"Good evening, Mr. Hoddy," said the visitor, pleasantly.

"Gr-r-r-umph!" replied Luke—as near as I can spell it. He was no great conversationalist, finding a growl express the most of what he had to say.

"I'm very glad to meet you," the visitor went on. "I think we should know each other, Mr. Hoddy."

"Gr-r-r-umph."

"It might lead to business, I think."

"Gr-r-r-umph?"

"Yes. You will find me an excellent customer. My command of money is unlimited—I handle most of what exists, at some time or other—and expense is no consideration, so long as I get what I want. I am prepared to pay, Mr. Hoddy; heavily."

"Gr-r-m." It was a slightly different growl this time. Old Hoddy was conscious of a possible opportunity. He did not care what he sold, if only it would fetch enough money. "I should want a lot," he said, "a plenshus lot. Money down."

"You shall have it."

"An' I won't sign—no, not nothen'—not till I get it, every farden."

The devil laughed—quite a gentlemanly

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laugh, with nothing offensive in it. "You are misunderstanding, Mr. Hoddy," he said. "I believe—I really do believe you have the absurd old notion I hear of so often. Do you think I want to buy your soul?"

"Course," answered Luke. "What else?"

"Really, really! I don't wish to say anything unkind, but is it likely? As I have told you, I have unlimited command of money, and I spend it freely for purposes of business. But I don't absolutely *pitch* it away, Mr. Hoddy! I don't pay for what is as good as mine already, for nothing! No, no. You are persisting in a very common and vulgar error. I may have entered into such a transaction as you indicate, now and again, but then the circumstances were exceptional. As a rule such an arrangement with anybody willing to enter into it, is altogether unnecessary, as in your case. No; I come to buy something else!"

"What's that?" demanded Hoddy, with suspicion. For his wits were not quick, and he knew he was dealing with a cunning customer. "Gr-r-r-umph! What's that?"

"Hate! I want to buy hatred, wholesale. I am the largest dealer in that line in existence, and I pay top prices. I do not ask lower terms in consideration of a big contract—I will even pay a specially high rate to a large producer like yourself; it saves trouble, and I want to have

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a substantial stock ready to hand. I sow it about all over the world, you see, and it is most annoying to find oneself in some happy, contented community, and the stock of hatred completely out. So I am here to buy all you can sell."

"How much?" asked Luke Hoddy, still suspicious.

"Oh, we shall never quarrel about terms, I promise you. You shall make a fortune out of it. Of course, there are plenty of people who throw their hate about so that I could pick it up for nothing, but the quantities are comparatively small; and really, you know, a gentleman *can't* go raking about in gutters for remnants and scraps, like some starving blackguard after crusts. Wouldn't do at all, you know. So I prefer to buy wholesale, and you are a perfect quarry—a mine. I am ready to take your whole stock."

"How much?" asked Luke Hoddy, again.

The visitor grinned quietly. "I do believe," he said, "that if I wished to drive a hard bargain I could swindle you, Mr. Hoddy. You are so very anxious about the money, and I'm sure you don't really guess what a stock of the goods you have in hand. I could make quite a bargain for the lot, I'm certain, and you'd be surprised at the amount you had sacrificed. But, as I have told you, money is no object with me, though I

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am not, at present, urgently needing the stock. I have been to a Philanthropic Congress lately, where everybody exuded it, wallowed in it, and pelted everybody else with it to such an extent that I couldn't resist the temptation to gather it in, though I really attended with the idea of sowing some I already had in hand. I am quite well provided for a time, but as a prudent man of business I like to look ahead and make engagements in advance. You want to know what I will pay. Well, I am ready to accept bills as often as you like to draw them, each for anything up to five thousand pounds. Will that suit you?"

Luke Hoddy gulped and gasped. This was tremendous. He had been thinking of fifties and hundreds, and here were thousands—and thousands over and over again, indefinitely. It was wonderful—too good to believe all at once. Perhaps it would turn out a swindle after all—a trick to rob him of the precious hate he had cherished so long, and which now seemed a more valuable possession than ever. Old Hoddy did not understand the acceptance of bills, and he resolved to question a little more.

"It seems a pretty good deal o' money," he admitted grudgingly. "Anyhow, a good deal for you to want to pay as can pick the stuff up. I should count there was plenty of hate about, too. It aint' a rare stuff."

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"No, it isn't. But, considering the plenteousness of the commodity, it's wonderful how little I get of it. People seem to want it for each other, you see. People talk a deal about hating me, but they hate each other so much more that it's very rarely I can get anybody's hatred without paying for it. And that is why I am here for yours."

"Gr-r-r-umph! Well, I'll sell. But none o' yer bills an' 'ceptances an' that. I want money down. See?"

"You shall have the money before I receive the goods. Will that suit you?"

Luke thought that would do, and growled to indicate as much.

The devil stooped in the shadow of the fence, and produced a box, which old Hoddy had not noticed before. It was a chest of some hard wood, bound and cornered with iron, and as soon as it rested on the fence-rail Hoddy grabbed it eagerly. As a box, it was heavy, but not so heavy as it should have been if it were full of money. In fact old Hoddy judged it empty.

"There ain't no five thousand pun' in that!" he snarled.

"Quite so; I never thought of pretending it. This is a little arrangement of my own invention, which I will explain." The night was full dark by now, but a dull red light fell on the chest

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wherever the devil pointed, and so Luke understood all he said.

"You perceive that the box is locked. I shall keep the key, and I advise you, for your own sake, not to meddle. It is a dangerous thing to open, if you don't understand it. The lid, you see, is a deep one. That is because it contains a separate chamber, into which you slip your bills for acceptance. There is a narrow slot, you perceive, just under the upper edge. Whenever you wish to do business, you will fill in one of the forms I shall leave you, with the amount of hate you wish to sell in money, up to five thousand pounds, and sign it. Then you will slip the paper in at the slot, and go to bed. That is all. In the morning you will receive the money. But, meantime, you must sleep; otherwise the sale cannot be completed. Take the box, and remember what I say. I shall not call again till I want some of the goods. Then I shall take away the box and leave a fresh one. Do you know, I'm rather proud of the invention of that box. Some day, if I have time, I intend to adapt the idea to other purposes. It might be made to work with pennies, for matches and lollipops and such things. Good notion, eh? But here are your bill-forms; if you want more you can copy one of them. And remember, no more than five thousand pounds at one time, if you please. That is the price of the largest quantity

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of hate the machine is able to compress in a day. That is all, I think. Good evening, Mr. Hoddy!"

And with that he was gone, vanishing in a very low and courtly bow, which somehow slid away backward into the shadows; leaving Luke Hoddy standing there with a bunch of papers in his right hand while he balanced the box on the fence with his left.

Old Hoddy stared for a minute and a quarter, and then, convinced that he really was alone, he picked up the box and carried it indoors. He lit a candle, put on his spectacles, and began to spell out one of the papers. Thus it read:—

Date—

*On presentation pay to me the sum of £ for
hate received.*

That seemed simple enough. Luke Hoddy sat in a chair, and stared, now, at the box. Having done that for a little while he turned to the paper again, and stared at that. And at last, when he found his faculties shaking down into their proper places, he got ink and pen, and filled in the topmost form. He filled it in for the full five thousand pounds, having a natural desire for as much as he could get. Then he signed it, slipped it into the slot, and went to bed.

In the morning he woke feeling particularly

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well—uncommonly well. As he got out of bed he caught sight of his face in the jaggy piece of looking-glass that stood on the mantel-piece and saw a positive smile on it. He sat for a moment to wonder at this, and presently broke into a laugh. He remembered a ridiculous dream about the devil and a chest.

Sunlight came in at the poky little window, and the sound of a thousand birds. The light fell on the corner of a deal table, and there lay a little bundle of papers. There was no mistake—they were the blank bills. Luke Hoddy rubbed his fist over his head to clear his thoughts. The thing would seem to have been no dream after all. But as he pulled on his clothes he remembered the attorney at Witham. No doubt this was some joke of his—Luke had noticed the extraordinary likeness from the first. But why should he take all this trouble to put a sell on a stranger? Luke Hoddy floundered into the only other room of his cottage, and there saw the iron-strapped box standing against the wall. Truly it was no dream. There, along the slot in the lid, lay the white edge of the paper, which he had thought he had pushed well in. Or at any rate it was some paper, or papers. *What* was it? He reached and pulled out—not one paper, but five; and each was a thousand-pound bank-note!

It was true then—quite true; neither dream

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nor sell, but simple fact. Here was the actual, indubitable money. Luke Hoddy sat for a while in the blankest of brown studies and then began to chuckle. Chuckling, he went out into the open and looked across the fields, lusty and sparkling in the fresh morning. A little child, carrying a basin in a blue handkerchief, stood in amaze to see old Hoddy so merry: whereupon he gave the child an apple for nothing, and sat down to laugh at the strangeness of things.

He sobered down after a little, and wondered at the impulse that had led to the gift. That apple was the first thing he had ever given away in his life, and it seemed a foolish thing to do. Especially—and the thought came like a grip at the throat—especially if the thing was a sell after all, and the notes spurious.

This was a matter that must be settled at once. So he watched for the carrier's cart that morning, and went by it to Witham, to the bank. Here his spirits rose again, for the cashier made no difficulty about the notes, but opened an account with them, and old Hoddy left the premises with a pass-book of his own, containing an entry of five thousand pounds to his credit.

He resolved to see about Paigles's farm without delay, and to that end called on the attorney. Hoddy observed the lawyer pretty closely, and was relieved to find that although he was smartly

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enough dressed, he was not so very much like the visitor of last night, after all. The lawyer promised to make discreet inquiries as to the price of the farm, and Luke Hoddy left him.

That night he filled in another bill for the full five thousand, and in the morning drew out another bunch of notes. Then he went out and caught the children going to school and distributed apples among them, till nothing remained on the tree but leaves; laughing so much at the fun that rumors arose that old Hoddy was gone mad. The bank-cashier was a little surprised to see him again with precisely the same amount, and the lawyer was also a little surprised to have another visit, and instructions to look out for a few more freehold investments, in addition to Paigles's farm. But that mattered nothing, and the next day old Luke Hoddy banked five thousand more.

Paigles's farm was for sale, and at a moderate price; also there was a deal of other eligible property to be had in the neighborhood, and as the money rolled in Hoddy took the first steps toward becoming a landed proprietor of no small consideration.

But lawyers have their fees to earn, and between the first steps and the last there are a great many more, and in those days there were more than there are now; and every step took

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time. So that it came to pass that, before the last seal was pressed and the last fee earned, old Hoddy, rising one morning very merry, turned to pull out his customary notes from the box, but instead of five, found only one piece of paper, and that not a bank-note. It was, in fact, his own bill of exchange, just as he had drawn it the night before; except that there now appeared across it, in the blurred capitals of a roughly-inked stamp, the words REFERRED TO DRAWER.

Luke Hoddy had grown so used to drawing his money regularly and making his daily trip to Witham, that he went through some minutes of dumb amazement before he realized that his stock of hate was at last absolutely exhausted, and no more bank-notes were to be expected from the box. At first his smile faded and his face lengthened; but it was not for long. Indeed he was a very rich man, and he had of late begun to wonder what he should do with all his money. For the credit of human nature I shall not tell the precise figure of old Hoddy's riches; and very few would believe in the existence of such a stock of hate as it would imply, if I did. But he was a very rich man, and was putting money into other securities beside land. So his face soon broadened again into the grin it had worn since he had stripped his apple-tree. He would not need to go to

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Witham to-day, and he would have leisure to think things over.

He was still in the little cottage on Cock-a-Bevis Hill—indeed there had scarce been time for a change. He used to detest the place, but now that all his hate was sold, he rather liked the situation. He had a design of building a house close by, some day, but meantime the cottage did very well, and he resolved in any event to leave it standing, and use it sometimes.

He went out into his garden and beyond the fence, whistling. Presently he saw the girl coming, driving her cows out to the meadow, and the brown lad with her, just as they had passed, in the opposite direction, on the evening when Hoddy had received the Owner of the Box. But this time they could not help seeing him, for he called to them gaily, with questions about banns and a wedding-day, and a promise of a silver tea-pot when the day should come. And when they had passed he was reminded to fill a basket with eggs and carry them down to the cottage of the round-faced woman who had so many children. After which, finding his experience in generosity such novel fun, he got five shillingsworth of pennies at the Crown and Cushion and gave one to every child he could catch. Some of them wanted a deal of catching, for it was not easy for people to understand this change in old Hoddy's habits. The fact

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was that not only had he got rid of all his old hatred, but when he remembered it he felt a little ashamed, and had a great desire to make amends.

Paigles's farm was bought at last, and more than half the parish with it; the last fee was paid and the deeds were locked in the strong-room at the bank. Then, when the time came to sell up Paigles, old Hoddy lowered his rent instead. And as to the other tenants, he discovered a way of grinding their faces against platters and quart pots, giving them and their families the most enormous dinner, in three barns, that Cock-a-Bevis Hill had ever looked down on.

It was in the merriment that followed this dinner that the transactions began that revealed the sole drawback to Hoddy's extraordinary bargain. For in his sudden revulsion from misanthropy and misogyny he conceived an almost exaggerated opinion of the attractions of his tenant's daughters and sisters, and, in some cases, of their aunts and mothers. Nor did it stop there, for as the days went and the news of his wealth and amiability spread and multiplied old Hoddy found himself involved in such a complication of entanglements, that there was nothing for it but once again to call in the aid of the Witham attorney, by whose arts, and the payment of a good deal of money, actions for

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breach were compromised, bigamy averted, and safety found in the end by marriage with an active and respectable widow.

But these things came to a head later, and in any case they have little to do with the story. Meantime, the iron-strapped box stood in the corner of Luke Hoddy's keeping-room, full of compressed hate, waiting for the devil to come and fetch it.

Now the report of old Hoddy's sudden wealth went about among the good folk of those parts, and not among the good folk only. It reached also two vagabond thieves, tramping through Witham from Springfield gaol, after a narrow squeak for their necks at the assizes; and this was not the first time they had cheated the gallows. They turned aside from the main road because of the rumors, for a feeble old man of great wealth, living alone in a cottage of two rooms, offered singular attractions to their inquiring natures.

They came to Cock-a-Bevis Hill, and learned enough to make them very hopeful; and that night they took a lantern and two bludgeons, and lifted old Hoddy's simple latch with neither noise nor trouble. Old Hoddy was snoring sturdily in the other room, but though they had come willing to stop his snore for ever, they checked at the sight of the iron-bound box in the corner. It stood very notable among the poor furniture about it, and here, they were well

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assured, was the best the place could yield, the end of their desires—the treasure chest. So they left old Hoddy to his snore, and carried the box quietly out, and up the breezy slope of Cock-a-Bevis Hill under the stars. In a sheltered hollow near the top they set it down, and pried it open with a chisel; and that was the end of both of them.

In the morning Paigles's horseman found them lying dead in the hollow, contorted and black—something like men struck by lightning; and the box lay by them, plain and empty.

When Luke Hoddy learned the news in the morning he looked up the hill and at the clouds, and saw that the breeze held steady from the west, as it had done the day before; and he knew that all his hate had been carried away on the winds from off the earth. It had saved the hangman a double turn, and that was all it had done, good or bad; what became of it nobody could ever tell, though since the wind was from the west, some of it may have fallen in Germany.

But the Owner of the Box was sadly vexed, as you would guess. Nevertheless he dissembled his anger, and as soon as he heard of his misfortune (which he did by means of which I know nothing) he came to old Hoddy, polite as ever, with the idea of reducing his bad debt as far as possible. He went cautiously to work, being out of confidence with himself in the county

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of Essex, and remembering his ancient defeat at Barn Hall—of which I may tell another time.

“Well, Mr. Hoddy,” he said, “we’ve had a little misfortune. It’s no fault of yours, of course, and I shall make some very special arrangements for the guilty parties. But to prove my perfect and continued confidence in yourself, I’ve come to do business again, on very exceptional terms. I’m ready to enter into that other little transaction at which you hinted during our last interview. As I said then, it’s a thing I rarely do, in spite of vulgar opinion to the contrary; but in your case, on old and respected customer, I’m willing to stretch a point. You’ve found me treat you very well in our first deal, and I don’t want to drop the connection. What do you say?”

Because, you see, now that all Hoddy’s hate was quite gone, Hoddy himself was such a very different person that he was a very desirable bargain, and the devil was ready to buy him forthwith.

Old Hoddy chuckled deep and long. “It do seem to me,” he said, “as you’d do better in the shires; I count you make a poor trade in Essex. At Dedham an’ Snoreham they be too wide awake for ’ee, an’ too clever at Little Witham; you’d starve at Pinchpoles, an’ you can’t fob’em at Fobbing. But a shire man allus was a fool, an’ I count you’d do better right

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over across the Lea, at Much Hadham. What you're at now is to buy me, eh?"

"At a great price, Mr. Hoddy; a noble sum!"

Old Hoddy chuckled again. "Very kind, I'm sure. 'Fore I lost my hate I'd ha' talked it over longways, but ready meat's my victual. D'ye know the stile at the bottom o' t' hill?"

"Yes."

"Well, if ye go over that an' keep along by t' hedge, you come to anoather. Know that?"

"Perfectly."

"Other side o' that there's a ditch."

"Just so."

"An' a meddy with a tree in the middle—oak. D'ye know the oak too?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you went along down there now, arl alone, an' ran round that there oak, who'd you be a-chasin'?"

"Myself."

Old Hoddy guffawed loud and long, with his thumb against his nose. "Go on then!" he said. "That's my opinion, too!"

THE RODD STREET REVOLUTION

I

I HAVE told the tale of the Red Cow Anarchist group in another place, and at another time; indeed I am startled to remember that it was fourteen years ago. As a fact the credit of that tale, if it has any, is due to my disreputable friend, Snorkey Timms, who told it me, as he told me others. He it was who first discovered Sotcher, the founder and victim of the Red Cow Group, and he it was who told me also this other tale of an earlier group of Sotcher's founding.

Teddy Mills, it would seem, was a shoemaker, who lived and worked in a very small house in Rodd Street, Bethnal Green—a very small street, which could only be reached by making several turns and twists through and out of other streets nearly as small. The little house had once been one of a row of country cottages, and the row even now carried some vague air of blighted ruralism, because of the muddy strips of front garden, which many tumbling children shared with many lank cats and a few very desperate scarlet runners on strings.

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Teddy Mills, small, bristly and wild of eye, was Sotcher's newest convert. As a jobbing shoemaker, in accordance with the mysterious laws which make all jobbing shoemakers swarthy and ill-shaved and politically rebellious, Teddy Mills was promising material, and Sotcher, lank, greasy and unwashed, fresh from the Anarchist Club in Berners Street, Shadwell, fastened on him at once. For, indeed, Teddy Mills made good material in other respects than that of his native readiness to join in the abuse and overthrow of whomsoever he might suspect of superiority, in fortune or qualities, over himself; for one thing, he had good work, and consequently money which might be cadged.

On the other hand, Teddy Mills had a wife, who was very intractable material indeed. Sotcher's impassioned teachings, received with enthusiasm by Teddy Mills, brought from Mrs. Mills no better tribute than a sniff of contempt; and the lady's opinion of Sotcher himself, wholly unfavorable, she expressed with much freedom and no politeness. And so it came about that, from the day of Sotcher's appearance, things went less smoothly in the Mills household. Teddy Mills's time soon seemed to be divided between listening to Sotcher and quarrelling with Mrs. Mills, so that very little was left for mere business, and the making and mending of shoes became more and more a theory of yesterday

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and to-morrow, and less and less a practice of to-day.

"Well," Mrs. Mills would say, appearing suddenly with a red face and tucked-up skirts after a day's washing, "I've done my day's work, 'cept clearin' up. 'Ow much 'a' you done?"

"I've done more'n you think," her husband would reply, with evasive dignity.

"Yes, that you 'ave, if you've done anythink but sit an' jaw along o' that dirty greasy spongin' thief Sotcher. I 'eard 'im. I 'eard 'im tellin you to do away with the p'lice. You'd look fine doin' away with the p'lice, you would! You'll do away with me, if there's much more of it! 'Ow long am I to keep this place goin' like this?"

"When the social revolution comes," Teddy Mills explained, "we sha'n't neither of us 'ave to work more'n an hour or two a day, 'cos everybody'll 'ave to work."

"An hour or two! Ho! An' 'ow's this place to be kep' clean an' food cooked an' all in an hour or two! But p'raps a woman's work don't count. An hour or two, says you! An' 'ow'll your dear friend Sotcher like it, I wonder? A 'ole hour! Did 'e ever do an hour's work in 'is life?"

"Mr. Scotcher's a speaker, I tell you, a pioneer—one as teaches the propaganda——"

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"Proper what? Gander? ' It's a proper goose 'e teaches when 'e comes 'ere a-preachin' to you! With 'is free this an' free that, an' free drinks between whiles! *I* ain't a-goin' to stand it much longer, so I tell you! I ain't a-goin' to work 'ere for you an' 'im too, on nothink. I can earn my livin' alone, I can, an' I will, if there ain't a change!"

Mrs. Mills tried Sotcher with direct personal insult, but that had no better effect than to turn his unceasing discourse to the denunciation of marriage as an oppressive and inconvenient institution, which should shortly be abolished, with the police, the magistracy, and every other relic of privileged authority, temporal and spiritual. On her part, Teddy's wife grew more urgently bitter as the days went.

And so it came to pass that one fine morning Sotcher arrived at the gate of Mills's front garden to find Teddy standing by the post, clutching at his touzled hair perplexedly, and staring gloomily up the street.

"She's gone," he reported briefly.

"Gone where?" asked the visitor, gazing up the street also, and seeing nothing.

"I dunno," replied Teddy. "She's hooked it, that's all. I did a bit o' work last night, an' took it 'ome this mornin'; an' when I came back there was this on the table."

He extended a crumpled scrap of paper, on

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which Sotcher read the scrawl: "*Good bye, i'm agoing to work for myself now.*"

"Selfishness," commented Sotcher. "The selfishness prevalent at the present time is due to the rotten state of s'ciety an' the oppression o' the privileged classes. When we 'ave the social revolution, an' free an' absolute liberty o' the individual, then selfishness 'll be swep' out o' the world."

"Yes," answered Teddy blankly, "but what—what am I a-goin' to do till it is?"

"Wave aloft the banner o' free an' unrestricted brotherhood and liberty in the face o' the bloated circles o' class an' capitalistic privilege," replied Sotcher, with the fluency of a fresh-oiled machine.

"What?"

"I said we'd raise our free 'ands an' voices in the sacred cause o' universal anarchy an' proudly march in the van of progress to the glorious consummation o' the social upheaval," Sotcher continued, knowing that one sentence meant as much as the other, and airing them, therefore, in turn.

"Yes—jesso," replied Teddy Mills, turning his uneasy glance toward the little front door; "but what about the washin'?"

Sotcher's eloquence was not to be turned aside. "Comrades with a glorious mission like us," he pursued, "can't waste time over washin'. I

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don't." The truth of this remark was visible to the naked eye. "We fix our eyes forward and up'ard, trampling under the feet of free initiative the relics of barbarous authority, an' overthrowin' the bloodstained temples of capitalistic monopoly!"

"Yes, I know," responded Teddy; "but when I said washin', I wasn't thinkin' so much of *our* washin'. She's bin takin' in washin' lately, an' earnin' a bit, an' I shall miss it."

This was a more serious matter, and Sotcher paused thoughtfully. He considered the situation for a moment, and then produced a brilliant project.

"Comrade Mills!" he said, lifting and exhibiting to Teddy's gaze the palm of a very grubby hand, "this is an 'istoric moment!"

"Is it?" asked Teddy innocently.

"It is. It's lucky your wife's gone, an' so put the scheme into my 'ead. We don't want 'er. We'll found the first real Anarchist colony!"

"Yes?" said Teddy interrogatively.

"That 'umble 'ome o' yours," proceeded Sotcher, "will be 'anded down the ages on golden trumpets, an' inscribed on the 'arts of generations to come. We'll begin the social revolution there!"

"All right," assented Teddy. So complete was his belief in Sotcher, that if the proposal

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had been to redistribute the solar system there he would have said "All right," just the same.

"We'll bring in one or two comrades an' live together in the full brother'ood of anarchy, an' give a example to the toilin' millions about us. We'll 'ave perfect individual freedom an' voluntary co-operation, an' the 'ole world'll take a lesson by us an' bust out in the glorious day-break of Universal Autonomy!"

"All right," said Teddy, again.

II

SOTCHER invited the co-operation of two more comrades, and he did not bring them from the Anarchist Club. Four he judged a convenient total number, since the house had four rooms, and he did not bring the two new comrades from the club, because he knew the club of old. There they were all talkers as fluent as himself, and not listeners. Sotcher wanted listeners. It was for that reason—partly—that he sallied forth "spreading the light"; for that, and because the Anarchist Club was the very worst place he knew for borrowing in.

So he brought fresh material. He brought one Billy Snider, a furtive person with an elusive squint and a curious property of looking smaller than he really was, though he was not large at best. Billy Snider, it seemed, was an "in-

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dividual expropriator." For years in the matter of private property he had been putting Anarchistic principles into practice without knowing it, and the bloated bourgeois called him a thief. He had derived a great deal of consolation and surprise from the discovery, drawn from Sotcher's discourse, that he was in reality a pioneer of human regeneration, working to an heroic purpose.

Sotcher also brought a certain Joe Budd, a very large man of much muscular development, with a face like knotted timber and a black eye that was sometimes the right and sometimes the left, and occasionally double, but always there. Mr. Budd was not understood to be partial to any particular profession, and the beer required for his sustenance had hitherto been chiefly contributed by friends who preferred to see him in a good temper. Sotcher had laid his account with care, for if Teddy Mills would work at his trade and Billy Snider "expropriate" out of doors for the benefit of the community, while Joe Budd kept off inconvenient interference, and terrorized such persons as broker's men, then Sotcher, for his part, was ready to supply all the talk the enterprise might require.

It was a great occasion for Sotcher, when the four assembled that evening, and he for the first time addressed a group that was all his own.

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"Comrades!" he cried, with a sweep of the arm that might have included a thousand, "we are 'ere to open, to inaugurate, or as I may say to begin, the Social Revolution! In this 'ere 'umble 'ome we are to set rollin' the ball that shall pave the way for the up'eaval of 'umanity, and, spreadin' its wings to the uttermost ends of the earth, write its name in letters of fire across the 'eavens! The only law an' order for free men is Anarchy! We shall live 'ere, comrades, in perfeck freedom under a brotherly compact that won't bind nobody. We shall set a example o' free life, with no law an' no authority, as 'll open the eyes o' the toilin' proletariat an' stir them to copy our noble proceedin's, an' go on to overthrow the p'lice an' the gover'ment, an' the water-rates an' all the disgustin' machinery of organized oppression!"

"'Ear, 'ear!" cried Teddy Mills.

"Our watchword shall be liberty, an' down with privilege an' monopoly. What is liberty, my comrades? Is it magistrates, an' prisons, 'an p'lice at the corner of every street?"

"No!" interjected Billy Snider fervently.

"It is not, comrades. The police is the protector of the real criminals, the plunderin' so-called upper classes! Stands to reason no honest man would want pertectin' by p'lice. P'lice is brute force—the brute force as the privileged classes is 'edged theirselves in with; paid

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myrmidons makin' slaves o' the people. *We* don't want no myrmidons, do we?" ("No!" again from Billy). "O' course not. We'd disdain to be seen speakin' to 'em. Very well, then, what does anybody else want with 'em? What but privilege an' monopoly? We will break down all privilege an' monopoly! Our comrade 'ere, our comrade Billy Snider, has been breakin' down monopolies for years. Not on a grand scale, p'raps, but wherever 'e could in a small way, an' 'e's suffered for it. In fact 'e's not long out from six months for breakin' down some bloated capitalist's monopoly of a gold watch an' chain. It's property as is the real robbery, an' all expropriators are our brothers. We now begin the social revolution, comrades. Liberty for all, voluntary co-operation, free initiative, free contrack, subject to perpetual change an' revision, do what you like an' take what you want—them's our principles, an' our only law is that there is no laws. I 'ave 'ere a box which will 'old the money of the community, an' I begin by offerin' it to comrade Mills, who will 'ave the honor o' bein' the first to give up 'is private ownership, an' placin' whatever money 'e 'as in the funds of the group."

Teddy Mills, amid encouraging murmurs, dropped into the box the sum of sixteen shillings and sevenpence; a large part of it would be

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due, next Monday, for rent, but a week's rent is not a thing to bother about when you are starting a revolution.

Billy Snider's contribution was rather less, and Joe Budd was discovered to have suddenly fallen asleep. Being with much difficulty aroused he promised to see about it to-morrow; and, showing signs of unpleasant irritation, was allowed to lapse into slumber once more. Sotcher produced a sixpence and three pennies with much solemnity.

"I ain't so fortunate as you, comrades," he explained, "in bein' able to contribute quite so liberal, but sich as it is it is my all, an' give freely. All the more credit to me, p'raps you'll say, comrades, but no—I don't claim no more merit than anybody else 'ere. There it is, give freely. Doubts 'ave been cast on the tanner, though only by slaves of the capitalist, sich as barmen. This is our capital, comrades, in this 'ere box, an' all money as comes in goes to it; an' what anybody wants he takes. We won't vote, for majority tyranny is the worst of all tyrannies, but I suggest we begin by gettin' in a little beer."

The suggestion was agreed to, and with the advent of the beer, Joe Budd's nap terminated with as much suddenness as it had begun.

"I like your speechmakin'," observed Billy Snider, over the beer, to Sotcher. "You put

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it fust rate. That about monopolies, you know. That's my principles, but I couldn't ha' put it so 'andsome. An' that about free contrack, too, an' changin' your mind when you like."

"One o' the first principles of Anarchy," remarked Sotcher. "Free contrack between man an' man, perpetual subjeck to revision an' cancellation. It is forbidden now by the rule of the brutal majority."

"Yes—I know that," observed Snider, "an I've suffered for it. I went a-bookmakin' once, to Alexander's Park Races. I did very well an' made a 'ole lot o' contracks, layin' the odds; but when I'd got my satchel pretty full o' the backers' money, an' they was lookin' at the 'orses, an' I 'ad time to think things over, why, I changed my mind about the contracks, same as anybody might do, an' started to go 'ome. Why not? But the brutal majority treated me shameful. Chucked me into a pond, they did, an' I 'adn't got more'n about a quarter of a suit o' clothes to go 'ome in."

"All owin' to the rotten system o' s'ciety," commented Sotcher. "The rule o' the majority's just as bad as any other rule; but there's to be no rule an' no majority now—no commerce an' profit-huntin'; free exchange, free everything!"

"That's what I've been lookin' for for a long

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time," said Joe Budd fervently, and finished his pot.

It is impossible to set going an entirely new system of life without a little friction, and the friction began at bed-time. There was only one bed in the place, and Billy Snider, having with much foresight discovered this fact in time, went to bed first, unostentatiously. When this treachery became apparent, Joe Budd's righteous indignation was worthy of the occasion. He took the slumbering betrayer of the rights of man by a leg and an arm, and hauled him out on the floor.

"D'ye call this equal rights," he demanded. "You sleepin' comf'table in a bed, an' us on the floor? Ought to be ashamed o' yerself. You ain't got no more rights in that bed than we 'ave; 'an as I pulled you out I'm goin' to sleep in it." Which he did.

In the morning it was perceived that Billy Snider had risen early and gone out.

"Gone on a job," commented Sotcher. "Hope he'll bring back something good."

At this moment Joe Budd, whose hand had strayed carelessly over the edge of the money-box as it lay on its shelf, uttered a gasp, and pulled down the box bodily. It was empty!

Joe Budd's opinion of Billy Snider when he pulled him out of bed was mere flattery to the

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opinion he expressed now. He kept at it so long that at length Teddy Mills took up a pair of boots that were partly mended and set to work to finish them. The sight of Teddy's industry somewhat calmed Joe, and presently he asked: "How long 'll you be getting them done?"

"Not more'n a quarter of an hour," Teddy estimated.

"Right," returned Joe, sitting down and feeling for his pipe. "I'll take 'em 'ome for you."

But here Sotcher interposed. "Don't you bother, comrade," he said; "they mightn't know you. *I'll* take 'em 'ome."

"No," replied Joe, taking his pipe from his mouth and looking very squarely into Sotcher's eyes. "I bet you won't."

Sotcher let it stand at that, and resigned himself to watch Teddy's work. When it was done, and the largest sum that could possibly be charged was decided on, Joe Budd was given precise directions to find the chandler's shop where the boots were due, and departed with them under his arm.

"Comrade Joe Budd," observed Sotcher, gazing thoughtfully at the ceiling, "is a noble soul, as every friend o' the social revolution must be. But from the point o' view o' the group, p'raps it's a pity 'e took them boots 'ome."

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"Why," asked Teddy, "'e won't stick to the money, will 'e?"

"Stick to it? No—not stick to it; not stick to it long, anyway. But 'e's a noble, impulsive soul, an' liable to get thirsty very sudden. An' 'e deals very free an' large, as regards thirst."

But Mr. Budd's thirst was destined to be unrelieved as yet. In five minutes he burst into the room in a state of exacerbated ill-temper, and exhibited strong signs of a desire to catch Teddy Mills by the throat. Teddy took up a position behind a table, with dodging-room on either hand.

"What d'ye mean?" demanded Joe Budd. "What d'ye mean by sendin' me out for nothin'? The chap at the chandler's shop's been an' took it off your bill, an' 'e says you owe 'im one 'an ninepence ha'penny besides!"

"Does 'e?" Teddy answered blankly. "It's very likely. My wife used to run a bill with 'im, but I didn't know 'ow it stood."

Here Mr. Budd was aware of something very like a chuckle from Sotcher.

"What?" he exclaimed, turning his wrath in a new direction; "laughin', was ye? Laughin' at me? Call that liberty, I s'pose? All right—gimme that 'at."

Sotcher's hat was a sad thing, but he wore it indoors and out as an expression of contempt for social forms. Joe Budd snatched it from

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his head, and drove out the dent in the crown with a punch of his fist.

"You take a liberty with me," he said, "an' I'll take one with you—that's equal rights. I'll expropriate this 'ere 'at, an' swop it for the clock on the mantelpiece—that's free exchange; and if I 'ave any o' your lip you'll get a free punch on the nose!"

And therewith, carrying the clock under his arm, Mr. Joe Budd walked out for the day.

It was a dull day's work for Teddy Mills, spite of Sotcher's eloquence. Sotcher explained that little difficulties were inevitable in the early stages of so glorious an undertaking as theirs, but that things would go more smoothly every hour. Late in the evening Joe Budd returned, very red in the face, a trifle thick in the voice, but noisy and argumentative withal.

He took the money-box from the shelf and shook it contemptuously. "Empty, o' course," he said. "You two ain't done much for this 'ere community to-day, but I will."

He dropped a pawn-ticket into the box, and put it down before them. "That's the ticket for the clock," he pursued; "all there is in the box. Seems to me you expect me to keep this 'ere show goin' all by myself. Well, any'ow I done my share to-day—where's my supper?"

He glared from Teddy Mills to Sotcher, and back to Teddy again. But with that his atten-

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tion was drawn in another direction by the stealthy entrance of Billy Snider.

Snider slid in quietly, though with an elaborate air of careless indifference. Joe sprang up and seized him by the arm. "Where's that money?" demanded the outraged Budd.

"Money? What money?" asked Billy, with much innocent surprise.

"What money? You know what money; all the money; the money in the box!"

Billy Snider wriggled uncomfortably and looked from one to another. "In the box? Oh, that? Well, I wanted it, you know, so I just took it—like we arranged."

"Like we—like we—— Why, you took it all!"

"Yes, I know. I wanted it all."

Joe Budd wasted no more words, but swung Billy Snider across the room, and pushed him backward over the table. "You turn out yer pockets," he commanded, "or I'll tear 'em out o' your trousers an' bash you arterwards. Go on! Turn 'em inside out!"

Billy Snider glanced towards the other comrades, but saw no encouragement. Very grudgingly he extracted several shillings and a few coppers from one trouser pocket and put them on the table.

"Go on! Out with the rest!"

With another reluctant effort, Billy added

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some more shillings; but Joe, with a preference for quicker business, thrust his fingers into his victim's waistcoat pockets with no reluctance whatever, and there found three sovereigns!

"Three quid!" cried Joe. "Look at that! An' last night 'e 'adn't got fifteen bob to pay into the funds!"

He released Billy and turned from one comrade to another a look of grieved surprise. "Seems to me I've bin made a victim of in this 'ere business," he said. "You're all in it, I b'lieve. Well, well—I won't appoint myself treasurer, 'cos that 'ud be officialism an' authority, an' agin the sacred principles of anarchy; I won't be treasurer, but I will take care o' the money. Where's my supper?" he proceeded, with a sudden burst of wrath. "'Ere you, Mr. Bloomin' Jawmedead, take that, an' get my supper!"

It was Sotcher who was addressed, and "that" was a vigorous bang in the eye. Sotcher staggered and gasped, and, with a tender hand over the bruised feature began a noisy protest based on the rights of sovereign humanity.

"Rights?" retorted Joe Budd; "it's equal rights for all, ain't it? Very well, I've punched you in the eye—you've got just as much right to punch me. Goin' to? Eh? Ain't you? 'Cos if you ain't, go an' get my supper. That's voluntary co-operation, that is. 'Anarchy is

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order' is what you told me yerself, an' I'm goin' to 'ave my orders carried out 'ere. I ain't agoin' to belong to a free community an' be done out o' my rights. This 'ere's a brother'ood of free initiative, whether you like it or no!"

Late that night, when Joe Budd had retired in state to the bed that had been Teddy's, Billy Snider suggested the propriety of a simultaneous attack on the common oppressor. But Sotcher, still tenderly fingering the black eye, was sure that his principles would never permit him to participate in an act involving the Tyranny of the Majority.

And in the morning it was found that Billy Snider had risen early again. He had not interfered with the box this time, for the pawn-ticket lay undisturbed. But Joe Budd, swathed in a blanket, came downstairs in a typhoon of violent language, to announce that his clothes were all gone, with the money in the pockets.

Now it chanced that Joe Budd's was the best suit of clothes in the house, while Sotcher's would never have paid for carrying off. But although Sotcher's clothes were left, and not a rag the worse, it was observed that he paled instantly at the announcement of Billy's second evasion, and clapped his hands to his pockets. There were some seconds of agonized and contorted investigation, and then the orator straightway vanished into the outer street; whence he

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returned in five minutes in company with that foe of all his dearest principles—a policeman.

"I've bin robbed in this 'ouse," Sotcher complained clamorously. "I've bin robbed o' two pound one an' four in this 'ouse, an' I'll 'ave the lor of somebody! That's the master o' the 'ouse, constable, an' 'is name's Mills. Ain't 'e responsible? I've bin robbed in this 'ouse, I tell you, an' I won't stand it. 'E's responsible in the eye o' the lor! Two pound one an' four was in my pockets, an' while there's lor an' magistrates an' p'lice in the country I mean to 'ave my rights. There's the man o' the 'ouse, constable!"

Boys came running, and women with aprons over their heads: and the Rodd Street revolution wound up ignobly in a street row of the most ordinary Bethnal Green type, the centre whereof was marked by the towering helmet of the policeman, about which swirled the excited forms of Teddy Mills, Alfred Sotcher, and a large and violent man in a blanket. While in the distance was perceived the rapidly approaching form of Mrs. Mills, who had heard rumors of strange doings at the home she had left temporarily, with a view of giving her husband a salutary shock, and was now most vigorously resolved to go and investigate matters for herself.

THE CHAMBER OF LIGHT

A FANTASY

IF I cannot tell a tale of a haunted house in which I have lived, nor even of one in which I have passed a night of trembling adventure (and indeed neither experience has been my fortune), I at least know enough of the strange case of Missel Hall to be able to present it in its completeness, or at any rate in as much of its completeness as will ever be known, and with an accuracy to which, I believe, few other persons could pretend.

The house is fairly large, as one might expect from its title; yet not altogether so large as one may sometimes see a "hall," for, indeed, the name is given rather loosely in Essex to almost any house of the least pretension. Wherefore it must be remembered that Missel Hall is not such a hall as some I have seen—like a quarter of a mile of Park Lane with a terrace before it—nor is it a mere farmhouse, like Tarpots Hall. It was, and is, no more nor less than a comfortably large house, just large enough for its advancing ends to be called wings. It stood in a comparatively bare part of the

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commonly well-grown county of Essex, and on a slight elevation, which looked across a little common, or heath, that was unusually flat for that same county, which the ignorant stranger believes to be flat everywhere.

When I called the house comfortably large, I meant that, and nothing more. That is to say, so far as size might give comfort, Missel Hall had it; but so far as a plague of ghosts and their terrors might abolish comfort, Missel Hall was the most uncomfortable house in the county. Once more I pick my words with care. The Hall *was* the most uncomfortable house in the county, before it received its last tenants; soon after their arrival the more active troubles ceased, and the whole ghostly peculiarities of the place settled down into one—silent and weird. There was a room which had a light of its own.

It was not a mere point of light—a ghostly candle, “corpse-light,” or anything of that sort—but a wan, sickly luminousness that filled the whole apartment. It is to be presumed that it persisted night and day, though bright daylight made it imperceptible; for as soon as the light began to fail, and even at midday, when a heavy thundercloud turned noon to twilight, the pale light grew visible through the one window of the haunted room, and persisted, through night or storm, till full sunlight outstared it.

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To see the house from the heath, standing black and desolate like a rock against the evening sky, with its one eye of unearthly light, was uncanny enough, but perhaps the effect was heightened when other windows showed the warm light of common lamps; for the contrast was striking, and no stranger could have passed without a twinge of surprise and wonder at the spectral light of the single high window in the east wing. I have heard people confess to a chilliness of scalp and spine at the sight. There was never another house in Essex be-devilled exactly in this way, though I think I remember to have heard some talk of a case rather like it in a western county.

But this strange light, as I have said, was not seen till after the arrival of the last tenants of Missel Hall. Before then the whole place had been given over to ghostly disturbances of many sorts; with the arrival of the Quilter family these suddenly ceased, and were immediately succeeded by this, a phenomenon wholly unprecedented, and, it would seem, less capable of explanation than any that had gone before.

The house was an old one, and hitherto all its ghostly appointments had been strictly correct and according to proper fashion and precedent. In course of time, it is true, they had grown so numerous as to make the house difficult to live in, for persons of any nerves but the

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strongest, and in the end they had caused the place to stand empty for some years; but there was nothing irregular—everything was perfectly in good form and (blessed phrase) *comme il faut*. There were:

Rappings.

Rumblings.

Shrieks with bumps.

Shrieks plain.

Furniture ill-used.

Ghosts with large eyes.

Do. without heads.

Heads with nothing else.

Eyes unappropriated.

Demoniac laughter.

A smell of Sulphur.

Do. Brimstone (without treacle).

All being, as you will perceive, phenomena of well established respectability and proved credence, as the learned are aware, from the writings of Cornelius Agrippa and Mr. Stead. There were other manifestations also, a little outside the limits of the regular schedule, though not so far from it as the strange light in the east wing. Thus it was testified by Mrs. Emma Skinner, a charwoman employed to clean the premises, that on shortly returning to a room where she had just completed her work, she found mysterious inscriptions scrawled with the points of ghostly fingers on windows, sideboards,

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mantelpiece, floor, walls—and in short wherever she had forgotten to dust, and that mocking laughter followed her as she fled in terror, the sounds intensifying to an appalling uproar, in the midst of which the horrified Emma believed she could distinguish her own Christian name, preceded by the exclamation “Whoa!” as though to call her back. Needless to say she did not pause in her flight, and arrived at last at the house of Mr. Benton, the agent for the property, breathless, and only so far capable of speech as to demand brandy and water and a week’s pay in lieu of notice.

As to the more regular phenomena there were scores of people who could testify to hearing noises, and dozens who had seen the ghosts; white ladies, misty old gentlemen in wigs and top-boots, at least one white man in armor; and there were several shapes of animal form. Indeed the last appearance recorded, on the authority of Mr. Wilkins, dairyman and purveyor of milk in the adjoining village, was of this character.

It appears that Mr. Wilkins, learning that Missel Hall was let at last, entered the grounds and approached the main door with the intention of leaving his business card on the step. Arrived on the spot, however, he found that the door had been left ajar, probably by the neglect of somebody who had been engaged in preparing

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the house for the reception of the new tenants. He entered, therefore, with the idea of leaving the card on a mantelpiece, where it would be more likely to attract notice.

The evening was closing in, but it was not yet dusk. Mr. Wilkins was in a perfectly calm frame of mind, not in any way predisposed to hallucination, being intent, indeed, on the recent scandalous price of turnips. He entered the nearest room, deposited his card on the mantelpiece, and was turning to go, when his attention was arrested by three distinct raps apparently coming from the wall behind him. He turned quickly, and beheld what seemed to be a light vapor, or steam, rising in the form of a column in the darkest corner of the room. It rose and thickened till it attained the size, as he afterwards expressed it, of a sixteen-gallon churn. Then this misty column suddenly fell forward in his direction, causing him to back hurriedly to the door. For the next few minutes Mr. Wilkins wholly forgot the price of turnips, for his whole mind and emotions were engaged in the fearful contemplation of one of the strangest phenomena recorded in the history of the supernatural.

The column fell forward, as I have said, and Mr. Wilkins gazed spellbound at the sight before him. For the misty body, a column no longer, continued to decrease in size, and to as-

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sume the general appearance of some bulky animal. Larger and still larger it grew, till it had surpassed the size of a sheep and even that of a calf, and the paralyzed beholder was aware, not only of indications of a tail, but of horns, and between the horns of a gradual growth of two distinct luminous points. With this last horror, the eyes, the spell was broken, and with a tearing effort Mr. Wilkins sprang through the doorway and ran, pursued by the monstrous phantom. He ventured to glance over his shoulder, however, as he reached the step of the outer door, and it seemed that already the spectre had begun to diminish in size. No longer did it seem of the bulk, and somewhat of the aspect, of a cow, but to be gradually resuming its former shape—a column.

Somewhat recovering his courage, Mr. Wilkins continued to run across the drive, till another glance over his shoulder assured him that the apparition had ceased to pursue him, and was now standing stationary, and shrinking, on the terrace. Mr. Wilkins dodged behind a convenient shrub and turned at bay. Truly indeed the appearance was fast diminishing. The horrible eyes were gone, only one horn remained, and the body had shrunk to a mere erect column, the height of a man. But the tail hung unaltered, stiffly dependent behind. Still the change went on before Mr. Wilkins's astonished eyes, till,

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with a gasp of amazed recognition, he found himself gazing at a spectral pump.

With that his courage returned, and he emerged from his concealment; for to a respectable dairyman, who sees to the cleanliness of his premises, no object is more familiar than a pump, and there is nothing in the world he is less afraid of. But as Mr. Wilkins advanced, extending his hand, by familiar habit, toward the pump-handle, so the ghostly object faded and thinned away to nothing, and Mr. Wilkins found himself standing alone, in the gathering gloom, before the door of the haunted house.

Nothing more was observed till the new tenants were completely installed. The moving in was accompanied by many strange noises, however, and although noises are common enough, indeed unavoidable, in any house-moving, the noises heard on this occasion were altogether unusual. There were no rapings nor dragging of chairs, and there was not anywhere a suggestion of laughter, demoniac or otherwise; but everybody agreed that the shrieks were terrible and pitiful to hear.

Fortunately the new tenants did not arrive till the disturbances had ceased; for Mr. Benton, the agent, with a courteous regard for their nerves pleasant to meet in these ungallant days, had refrained from mentioning the little drawbacks from which Missel Hall suffered, and as

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the Quilters came from London they had no other means of learning.

The whole of the active Quilter family was female, consisting of a mother and five daughters. The remaining member was Mr. Quilter, an elderly and obese gentleman who slept between meals and was not observed to pursue any more exciting occupation. The ladies could not be called obese—unless you wished to be impolite to Mrs. Quilter—and they wore curious sack-shaped clothes. Their eyes were very earnest and their hair was not very long and not very short, but very touzly and very red. They decorated and furnished the house—filled it top and bottom, except for one little unconsidered room—with wonderful furniture and amazing wall-papers, all of a sort that I have heard called the product of the New Art. The chairs were made of square oak planks, with stencil-holes like fireworks in their backs. All the tables straddled their legs wide to snare the feet of the heedless. There was a sideboard with pewter rockets inlaid all over it, and a balloon of blue enamel at the summit of each rocket.

The dining-room was papered with a cheerful pattern of green stag-beetles a foot long, with yellow legs, crawling perpendicularly up a rich crimson ground. The drawing-room, on the other hand, was of a bold yellow tint, dotted at wide intervals with very elegant brown cauli-

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flowers, each with a graceful fringe of curly tentacles, like the legs of an octopus, reaching out to its neighbor. Curly tentacles, in fact, formed the chief motive of all the decoration—tentacles with flaccid curves like those of an expiring boa constrictor.

The tentacles were everywhere. They drooped and crawled over a pewter clock with three bowed legs and a square face on the morning-room mantelpiece. They squirmed so thick on the lids of the silver toilet-boxes on the dressing-tables that I have seen nothing like it since I went fishing as a little boy, with worms in a canister. You found yourself unconsciously prancing on tip-toe across the wriggling carpet—instinctive survival of man's primeval repulsion from the serpent. The tentacles came at you round corners, threatened you from behind doors—wormed about on your dinner-plate. On any piece of furniture you might choose to handle you would find unexpected projections and surprising outworks, each with its curly tentacle, and probably a piece of inexplicable copper or pewter, with tentacles of its own. And through it all Mr. Quilter slept undisturbed, and his daughters played on a green oak piano with pewter pot-hooks and hangers lovingly inlaid all over it, and all was peace and New Art.

And now, with the advent of the Quilter family, the whole supernatural history of Missel

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Hall culminated in the amazing spectacle of the Luminous Room. No more did mysterious noises and strange sights disturb the repose of the dwellers, but that strange pale light shone out from the high attic, otherwise empty, and declared the ghostly fame of Missel Hall to every watcher of the night.

At first the Quilters—except Mr. Quilter, who was asleep—were seriously disturbed by the discovery; and ere long, as was natural, their anxious inquiries brought them information of the earlier history of their house. But days and nights went on and nothing occurred to justify their fears—there was nothing but that weird light in the empty attic, which gave them no inconvenience at all. So that soon they grew rather proud of the phenomenon, and brought their friends to see it. One or two bold spirits among these friends ventured into the luminous chamber by night; and the reports of each visit agreed precisely with the others. The strange light pervaded the whole room—all agreed on this point. It was like no light any witness had ever seen; persons standing in it were plainly enough visible to each other, but with a pallor and a certain dimness of outline that admitted but of one description: they looked like ghosts. Indeed it would seem as though the illumination did not consist of light, as human experience knows it, but rather of something which not only

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lighted persons and objects in the room but also *interposed* between them.

Withal, it cast no shadow. This was, perhaps, its most remarkable quality. If one carried a candle into the room the objects it lighted cast their shadows in a natural way, though, of course, owing to the pervading luminousness the shadows were very feeble. But without any such artificial light no shadow was thrown, of anything, anywhere. The light, whatever it was, was all-pervading. And whatever it was it so affected the atmosphere that it was difficult to breathe therein.

The Misses Quilter became ardent spiritualists. They brought expert friends from London, who arranged *séances* in the astonishingly furnished rooms, and accomplished nothing. The failure was unprecedented, and the experts were wholly at fault. Not a table would move, not a mark would appear on a slate—and that in this ancient haunt of spectres, Missel Hall! The science of spiritualism was shaken to its foundations.

After much anxious consultation the experts resolved on a fresh expedient, and thereby made possible one of the most curious demonstrations recorded in the history of their craft. At the head of a small sheet of paper the question was written: *What causes the light in the east wing attic?* This paper, with a pencil, was enclosed

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in a small box, and the box was placed inside the lighted room and there left, with the door shut.

At the end of ten minutes the box was withdrawn, and, the paper being examined, it was found to carry below the question the almost illegibly scrawled word: *Terror*.

A fresh paper was prepared with the amended question: *What is the light?*

By the same process, and after a similar interval, another reply was elicited. This time it read, somewhat ungrammatically: *Only us. Crowded like*—(remainder illegible).

This reply caused much interest and excitement among the experts. A fresh question was prepared and answered, and others after that, as are transcribed below.

Question.—*Do you mean you are the ghosts that haunt this house?*

Answer.—*Yes. We apologize. Take them away* (illegible words follow).

Q.—*Please answer more clearly.*

A.—*Take them away. We are squashed into a mass and terrified to death. We really do apologize!*

Q.—*For what do you apologize?*

A.—*Everything. Anything. Only take them away. We apologize for haunting this house and frightening people. We will never do it again; we have been frightened too much ourselves. We've all gone through a good deal, but never*

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anything like this. We can't stand it. There's only this room left, and we are crowded solid. We dare not come out. It is terrible.

Q.—*What terrifies you?*

A.—*All of it! Furniture! Snakes! Fireworks! Cauliflowers! Tentacles! Curlywigs! Jim-jams! Sacks and touzly wigs! Pray do something for us.*

Q.—*What must we do?*

A. (an almost undecipherable mass of ragged scrawls, apparently from many different hands in all sorts of directions on both sides of paper).—*Take them away . . . Benton . . . raise rent . . . Apologize. . . . Never frighten people any more. . . . Know what it is ourselves now . . . never expected this. . . . Worse things than us. . . . Help! Police . . .* (rest wholly illegible).

These mysterious words are all the explanation extant of the amazing phenomenon of the Luminous Room. Answers to succeeding questions were wholly unreadable, and in the end the experts gave up their attempts to unravel the mystery.

It is a fact, nevertheless, that since the Quilters have left Missel Hall (they have been gone six months now) the strange light has wholly disappeared from the attic and it has not been followed by any of the more ordinary terrors which preceded it; a fact that, it is said, will

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shortly be cited in a paper to be read before a spiritualistic congress and adduced as a proof that ghosts may be relied on to keep their promises, even when extorted under stress of deadly terror.

MR. BOSTOCK'S BACK- SLIDING

IT is a terribly easy thing to fall into—imperceptibly to glide into—evil-doing; and once embarked on the slippery descent, there is no telling how low one may descend. This, the moral of the story of Mr. Bostock, is, in accordance with modern practice, placed at the beginning of the story instead of at the end, which our grandfathers considered the proper place. Nowadays we get the moral over and out of the way as soon as possible, and find it good riddance.

Mr. Bostock was a person of that peculiar stainlessness which is only to be observed in a London suburb of the highest respectability, always in association with the precisely correct clothes for every occasion, and a comfortable income derived somehow from the City. He was no longer young, nor slim, and his large, clean-shaven countenance carried the heavy portentousness noticeable in the Strictly Proper. Regularity, Propriety, Serene Importance—these words could be traced across his white waistcoat and his pink face as distinctly as though spelt in printed letters; and Severe Respectability shone like a halo from the high polish of his crown.

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Every admirer of the female sex—every discriminating person, in other words—will at once perceive that there was a Mrs. Bostock to whom much or all of this perfection was due; indeed, the ribald of his suburb ascribed Mr. Bostock's correctitude to simple terror of his wife. This was the slander of vulgar malice, of course, but it is a fact that Mrs. Bostock was a lady well fitted to inspire terror in the unregenerate; and those whom she regarded as her social inferiors—which meant very nearly everybody—had reason to quail before her overbearing majesty.

Twenty-four years of training under Mrs. Bostock's severe eye had endowed Mr. Bostock with the shining qualities so vastly respected in his suburb, and of late her supervision had been reinforced by that of their two daughters, now grown up. It may be that it is not permitted to mere man to receive a greater share of this sort of blessing than can be conferred by an energetic wife and one full-grown daughter; that the gradual accession of assistance from another daughter, as she reaches womanhood, will overcome the fortitude of the most respectable. It is certain that Mr. Bostock's lapse occurred shortly after Julia, his second daughter—now arrived near marriageable age—had fully ranged herself by the side of her mamma and her sister in the direction of his comportment.

The family were staying at the seaside at the

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proper period of late summer, and, of course, at the proper place. The town is already sufficiently well advertised, so here I shall call it Scarbourn, which is not in the least like its real name. Everybody will readily recognize it, however, from the circumstance that it is the most genteel town on the English coast, where every male visitor positively must change all his clothes at least three times a day, and no lady must be seen to wear anything twice. Also, the promenade is the one place for pedestrian exercise, and the vulgar act of walking on the beach is never condoned. No place on earth basks in a more sacred odor of perfect respectability than this blessed spot, with nothing to mar its bliss but the presence of a vulgar convict prison a few miles inland, and the fact that the approach by railway lies through another seaside town of the most unpardonable description, where parents paddle on the sands among their children, and the air resounds to the banjo and tambourine of the nefarious nigger. It is said that the Scarbourn visitors barely forgave the King for the proximity of His Majesty's prison, and that only in consideration of his social position; but the railway company might beg forgiveness in vain for bringing their line through Beachpool-on-Sea.

Mr. Bostock's temptation came insidiously yet suddenly, giving him little time for choice. There

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was some expectation that the office in the City, which provided the means for Mr. Bostock's respectability, might require his presence for a day or two in the midst of his vacation; and there was hourly expectation of a telegram from his head clerk to call him. Mr. Bostock was somewhat puzzled, almost shocked, to detect himself looking forward to the receipt of the telegram with something vastly like pleasurable anticipation; and with this begins the tale of his backsliding.

A telegram *did* come, immediately after breakfast on a brilliant August morning. Mr. Bostock tore it open eagerly. It *was* from his chief clerk, indeed; but—it conveyed the news that the matter in question had been satisfactorily settled, and that Mr. Bostock's presence in London would not be required. Mr. Bostock sank back in his easy-chair in a frame of mind which he distinctly recognized as one of gloomy dejection.

Mrs. Bostock and her daughters were dressing for a morning drive in the jobbed carriage that conveyed them everywhere, except for the promenade walk; and as Mr. Bostock sat back with the telegram in his hand his wife appeared, patting and smoothing her gloves.

"Oh—that telegram *has* come, then," observed Mrs. Bostock. "Then we'll ask Mrs. Berkeley Wiggs to take your seat, and we'll drive out a little when I've done some shopping

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in the town. I suppose you'll catch the ten-thirteen?"

Here was Mr. Bostock's temptation, and here began his fall. "Y—yes!" he stammered, hastily, crumpling up the telegram and stuffing it away in his pocket. "Yes! I'll—I'll catch the ten-thirteen, of course. Too late for the fast train, of course. Of course. Yes, my dear—I'll go off and catch the ten-thirteen. Don't bother about me—I'll walk, or have a cab. Yes—of course, I must catch the ten-thirteen!"

A very easy thing, the fall of Mr. Bostock. You will observe that *he* said nothing as to the contents of the telegram—not a word. Mrs. Bostock assumed that the message was the one expected, and her husband merely allowed her the assumption. Almost anybody might have done the same thing—accidentally, as it were. And, in fact, Mr. Bostock hardly realized what he *had* done till Mrs. Bostock had departed in search of Mrs. Berkeley Wiggs; the most recent accession to her acquaintance, and Socially Immense.

Even when he did fully realize the position of affairs Mr. Bostock betrayed no symptom of remorse. His behavior, indeed, for the next hour or so diverged every minute farther and farther from the precedent set by twenty-four years of strict regularity. He took a cab to the railway station, and during the short ride his

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demeanor so changed that the startled cabman scarcely recognized his fare as he emerged. Mr. Bostock's hat had settled over at a jaunty angle, and Mr. Bostock's face had acquired a joyous, almost a waggish, expression. A shade of apprehension crossed it as he approached the booking-office window and glanced nervously about him. Then he plunged his head deep in at the little hole, and demanded his ticket in a voice inaudible from without. He took his seat in the ten-thirteen train, just as he said he would; but—and here you may begin the measure of Mr. Bostock's backsliding—he got out at Beachpool-on-Sea!

Not without some nervousness and trepidation, it is true; for the habit of twenty-four years is hard to shake off. But once out in the High Street of Beachpool, Mr. Bostock's gradual expansion was a wonderful thing to see. He put his hands in his trousers pockets, he put his hat positively at the back of his head, and at the end of the street, by the sea, he bought a cane and swung it!

Mr. Bostock was taking a little holiday "on his own," as the vulgar say. How long he was going to stay, what arrangements he should make, and all the rest of it he had as yet thought nothing of. Here he was, free and irresponsible, at Beachpool, where nobody knew him, and ready for a holiday after twenty-four years'

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respectability. He went back to the shop where he bought the cane, and there bought a pipe and an ounce of tobacco. Mrs. Bostock had never allowed him to smoke anything less respectable than a cigar since they were married. Sometimes she had even bought the cigars herself. Perhaps I should not have mentioned this last circumstance, since it is far from my design to arouse sympathy for the perverted Bostock.

As for him, he grew wilder at every step along the beach. For he walked along the sands here like any low tripper, and once he actually "skated" an oyster-shell along the water—not very well. Then he stopped to listen to a group of niggers, and even laughed—laughed aloud—at a song about a "missis" and a mother-in-law, and put twopence in the tambourine rather than go away before it was finished. And as he went on among the children digging sand and their elders devouring fruit and buns, he burst into little gasps of laughter at nothing whatever, and was barely able to repress an insane desire to dance in public. The desire grew so urgent, indeed, that he walked straight on along the beach, past the last of the family groups, and into the solitude beyond. Here the cliffs began, and the shore was strewn with large stones, which presently gave place to boulders.

Mr. Bostock was two miles from Beachpool, and absolutely alone with the cliffs, the boulders,

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and the sea. He took a cautious glance about him, laughed aloud twice, and burst into the most astonishing fandango ever executed by an elderly gentleman having no connection with the stage. Then he plucked the hat from his head, flung it at his feet, and kicked it over the nearest boulder. Mr. Bostock had utterly thrown off the mask!

He picked his hat up, however, with some solicitude, and sat on the boulder to restore its shape. Then he held it at arm's length and laughed at it, loud and long. No hat of Mr. Bostock's had endured such derision before.

He clapped it on the side of his head, stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and gazed out over the sea, chuckling. The great green water was beautiful and smooth and soft, and the day was warm. Mr. Bostock had not had a swim for years; Mrs. Bostock did not consider the exercise suitable to his dignity and his years, nor, indeed, the costume to his figure.

He had no bathing costume now, but did that really matter? There was not a soul in sight, nor likely to be one. The nearest person at Beachpool was two miles off, and Scarbourne was quite seven miles away. There was the towel difficulty, of course; but Mr. Bostock had a mind above difficulties just now, and a towel was a trifle beneath his soaring notice. As a boy he had run about to get dry, and now

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he chanced to have two big, clean pocket-handkerchiefs. Mr. Bostock was tuned up for a wild adventure, and this was the wildest he could think of. He took one more look along the deserted shore and up at the silent cliffs, and began to pull off his clothes.

There never was such a delightful swim as Mr. Bostock indulged in from that deserted shore. There were cool, transparent pools among the rocks that dotted the shore, and farther out there was just enough motion in the water to save monotony. The air was warm and the water of a pleasant coolness, for as yet the sun had not brought it to its full summer-day temperature. And all the while not a soul came in sight along the shore. From time to time Mr. Bostock glanced back to the solitary dark speck among the boulders which he knew to be his heap of clothes, and he saw it always quite safe.

So time went, while Mr. Bostock, from time to time floating on his back and gazing thoughtfully into the blue of the sky above, revolved in his mind scandalous fraudulent plans for the future, whereby forged telegrams from the office should procure him more holidays like this. Thus does fancied impunity embolden the evil-doer.

Still, delightful as that swim was, Mr. Bostock realized that he must come out of the water

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sooner or later, and at length he turned and headed for the shore, marking his course by the little dark spot where he had left his clothes. He came in slowly and easily, dreading no evil. The tide had risen a little, and he congratulated himself on getting in in time to save his clothes a possible wetting, a danger he had not considered, in the excitement of the adventure. He rose from the water's edge, grasped the boulder, took two tender steps on the shingle—and instantly rushed back into the sea and swam off as hard as he could go.

In the whole course of his hitherto exemplary life Mr. Bostock had never had such a shock—such a horrible, stunning surprise. The clothes were not his!

But this alone was a comparative trifle. For what had sent Mr. Bostock staggering back as from the charge of a bull, what had propelled him headlong into the sea and set him swimming as though the bull had turned into a shark, was the appalling fact that he had found himself confronted with a heap of *female* garments!

There seemed to be no possible mistake. It was a black, rusty-looking heap, with a rather disorganized bonnet and a pair of cloth-topped boots of the sort called "jemimas," down at heel, bulgy at the toes, and very loose and frilly about the elastic sides. It seemed, in

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short, the outfit of the sort of elderly female for whom the only word is "geezer."

A little way out from the shore Mr. Bostock ventured to turn about and tread water. Surely that *was* the boulder on which he had left his clothes? They had been quite visible from the sea, as he distinctly remembered, and now the only heap of clothes in sight was the heap he had just fled from, lying precisely in the same spot. There was not a soul in sight, nor any human belonging except that heap of clothes on the boulder. Nobody was visible on the water, nobody on the shore. Mr. Bostock swam in a little way, till he could stand on the sandy bottom, with his head and shoulders above water, and then, remembering the expedient of Mr. Pickwick in the wrong bedroom at Ipswich, called out very loudly, "Ha—hum!"

Mr. Bostock waited for an answer, but heard nothing but the sea, and saw nothing but that and the shore and the dark heap of clothes before him.

There was certainly not another pile of clothes anywhere in sight, and Mr. Bostock, his first fright over, began to grow very anxious. He walked a step or two farther in and called again, this time very loudly indeed, "Ha—hum!" And then, when no sound answered him, he proceeded—"Anybody there?"

Nobody was there, it would seem, so presently

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Mr. Bostock, staring wildly and anxiously in all directions, crept out of the water again. Was it possible that his eyes had deceived him?

No; the clothes were exactly what he had taken them to be, and no others were in sight. He snatched hastily at a grubby old plaid shawl that crowned the heap, and, wrapping it about him, began to explore the beach.

It was all useless. Nobody was near him, and not a scrap of his own clothing was to be seen. Mr. Bostock's mind did not work with great rapidity, but now that he had got dry by his boyhood's method of running about the beach, with some assistance from the grubby plaid shawl, he realized that he was faced by the dreadful prospect of returning to civilization disguised as a "geezer."

He lifted the shabby garments gingerly, and shuddered. They had that peculiar gritty griminess that makes any sensitive person shudder, and they smelt damp, like a rag-shop. Mr. Bostock shrank and groaned, but there was no help for it. With an infinitude of shivers and squirms he began to put them on.

He felt about the skirt for pockets, and grew conscious of a new terror. There *was* a pocket—a torn, clammy bag dangling by one corner—and it was empty! In the pockets of Mr. Bostock's vanished suit were nearly ten pounds in gold and silver, a pocket-book with several

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notes in it, a gold watch and chain, and some other valuables, to say nothing of his railway-ticket. He broke into a cold sweat. Not only must he go among his fellow-creatures as a "geezer," but as a "geezer" absolutely penniless!

The prospect was more terrible than anything Mr. Bostock had imagined in his life. He broke into a fit of savage indignation at the callous depravity of the wretched female who had stolen his clothes, and must now be masquerading in them as a man—in itself a scandalous offence against the law. And at that reflection Mr. Bostock's distress became, if possible, still more acute. For it struck him that he too, arrayed in the horrible clothes he was struggling with, would be committing the same scandalous offence, and liable to the same penalty!

At length the dismal toilet was complete, and Mr. Bostock, miserable enough, but ignorant even now of the amazing figure he was making by reason of his unskilful management of the unaccustomed garments, addressed himself to the next step. Beachpool was two miles in one direction, Scarbourne more than seven the other way. Pulling nervously at the strings of the battered bonnet, which all too scantily covered his lack of tresses, he turned first one way and then the other. Which way should he go?

The rising tide answered the question for him.

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Long before he could traverse the seven rocky miles under the cliffs he would be caught by the tide; so perforce he turned back to Beachpool. He did it with some vague sense of relief, too, for he had not yet invented a means of dodging Mrs. Bostock. He did not even know where she might be encountered. The capture of Mrs. Berkeley Wiggs had been the object of some ambition, and now that it was effected, Mrs. Bostock would probably keep her as long as possible—for a drive inland—to lunch—anything convenient. But even supposing Mrs. Bostock safely out of the way, how could her wretched husband possibly enter the select boarding establishment undetected in the guise of a "geezer"?

The way to Beachpool was filled with perplexity, and Mr. Bostock grew desperate as he went. What could he do? Whose help could he ask? Who would lend money to an apparently and obviously disreputable old woman, who told a cock-and-bull tale of being a gentleman of substance, much respected in the City, in need of a little temporary assistance? The very best he could hope for from such a course was that inquiries would be made, which was the last thing he wanted; for, in his mind's eye, he saw the terrible figure of Mrs. Bostock, stern, suspicious, and incredulous, standing at the other end of those inquiries. But it would be far

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more likely that he would be given in charge of the police straightway.

Mr. Bostock was convinced that to beg would not only be difficult, but useless; and in his dire extremity he began to consider the possibility of stealing—of stealing clothes, money, anything that would get him out of this horrible mess. So low had the principles of the hitherto blameless Mr. Bostock been brought in the course of a mere hour or two from his tiny, almost involuntary, departure from the path of rectitude. (Refer to moral, *ut supra*.)

As a man of business it had, of course, occurred to him to wire to his office for a telegraphic money-order, to be sent to the nearest post-office. But, as a man of business also, he remembered that any person applying for the money must produce complete proof of his identity. Proof of his identity in this amazing rig! But, to begin with, the telegram to the office must cost at least sixpence. And where was the sixpence?

And so Mr. Bostock crept into Beachpool in a very different state of mind from that in which he had left it; meditating theft. He was ready to steal the pennies from a blind man's hat. Indeed, he would have preferred that proverbial form of larceny before any other, from its comparative safety and simplicity; but blind men have far too little in their hats.

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He slunk about the back streets, sweating with terror at the notice he was attracting. It was only because of his clean-shaven face that he had dared to come into the town at all, and now he began to wish himself back on the empty beach. But something must be done, and desperation forced him far beyond his natural courage, which was not very great. He found himself in a street leading directly into the High Street, and straight before him in the High Street was a cheap tailor's, where dummy figures, labelled "This style, thirty shillings," stood by the door.

No peri ever gazed at the portals of Paradise with half the ardent longing with which Mr. Bostock stared at the door of that cheap tailor's shop. Very gladly would he have given a cheque for fifty pounds for one of those shoddy suits and a ticket to London. He had no cheque-book, and if he had, what would any sane tailor think of such a proposition from a disreputable-looking old woman?

But the shop, with its possible salvation, attracted him. Perhaps he *might* make an arrangement with the tailor. He drew nearer, eyeing the dummies at the door with an affectionate interest which might well have aroused the notice of any observer, and, in fact, did attract the attention of the shopkeeper, lurking like a spider in the recesses of his shop. Even in his

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present excitement, Mr. Bostock was sane enough to see the impossibility of either stealing a suit off a dummy, or eloping with the dummy complete, clothes and all, under his arm. But as he neared the doorway he could not resist the impulse to extend his hand to the coveted garments; and at that moment the shopkeeper appeared.

He was a shiny, stout, frock-coated Jew, and he said, very peremptorily: "Here, vat you vant? Out o' dis here!"

Mr. Bostock thrust all his resolution into his voice; it was a rather large, round, rolling voice, very impressive from a confident middle-aged gentleman in the right clothes, but startlingly out of character with his present outfit.

"I—ah—wish to see you privately on a matter of business," said Mr. Bostock.

"Ah, I dessey," replied the shopkeeper; "ve got noddin to give away here. Hook it, misses; sharp!"

"But I assure you—if you will only listen—"

"Got no dime to stand talkin' mit you. If you *von't* go—then *pht!* B'leesman!"

Mr. Bostock had not noticed that two policemen were inspecting him with some curiosity from the nearest corner. Now he saw them with a sudden twinge of alarm, and straightway began a hurried retreat across the road.

"Hi! You there! Here—come here!"

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cried one of the policemen, starting smartly after him.

At that Mr. Bostock lost all hold of his wits, and, snatching up his skirts in both hands, ran madly up the street he had come by, followed by both the policemen and the beginnings of a joyful crowd.

With no more thought of disguise, no more plans or schemes, nothing but a frantic desire to get away, anywhere, anyhow, Mr. Bostock scampered up one narrow street and down another, with a gathering hunt behind him. The bonnet dangled over his shoulders by the strings round his neck, and the bulgy "jemimas" threatened to fly off his feet as he ran. Blind instinct taught him to turn each corner as he came to it, and so keep out of view of his pursuers as much as possible; and fortunately his way led him through the old town, where the fishermen's alleys favored his flight. But Mr. Bostock was a poor runner, and it was the mere spur of terror that kept him ahead. He caught at a post and swung into a street leading down to the sea, and as he did it he met a gust of wind that took the bonnet clean away up the street behind him. There was an alley to the right, and into that he plunged, bonnetless and somewhat bald; and farther still, growing slower and more "blown" as he went, till he emerged at the back of a row of unfinished

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houses in the outskirts of the town. And here he trod on a brickbat, which twisted the "jem-ima" sideways on his foot and flung him headlong.

He could run no more. His little remaining breath was clean knocked out of him, and he lay where he fell, beaten and done for. But presently, as the first shock of the fall wore off, he became aware that the noise of pursuit had ceased, and that, as a fact, he was alone behind the unfinished houses, and comparatively safe. The lost bonnet had saved him, for the hunters naturally kept on up the street along which they found the thing bowling, and so off on the wrong track.

Mr. Bostock climbed painfully to his feet, and crawled, panting, behind a broken fence. Why he had been chased with such persistence he could not divine, but, at any rate, it was clear that he must get out of Beachpool with no more delay. He put the plaid shawl over his head, and made shift to pull the rest of his dress into some sort of order. Then he started out, with much timid reconnoitring to tramp to Scar-bourne by road.

There was nothing else to be done. He must approach the back way to the select boarding establishment, and take one of the servants, who might recognize him, into his confidence. He would promise anything—a sovereign, five

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pounds, whatever the girl asked—to be smuggled in during the absence of his family. It was a difficult expedient, but the only one. And with this last resort in view Mr. Bostock began his nine miles' tramp.

He went with the greatest caution till he was well clear of Beachpool, and even then only ventured to walk his best—which was not very good, for he was mightily tired already—when nobody was in sight. Twice he stopped to extract small pebbles from the “jemimas,” which had cracks convenient for their admission; and then, as he approached the confines of a village, he stopped for a more peremptory reason still. For there was a bounce from the hedge behind him, a pair of stalwart arms clasped him round, and a loud voice shouted by his ear: “Here he be, sergeant! I got him! Sergeant!”

Struggles were unavailing, for the arms clipped him firmly just above the elbow, and the affrighted Mr. Bostock perceived that they were encased in blue sleeves, with an armlet; at the same moment a hatless policeman came running from a cottage by the wayside and seized him in front.

“Get the handcuffs, sergeant! He be a desprit char’cter!” bawled the voice in the captive’s ear.

“All right—we won’t stand to none of his despritness here,” replied the sergeant, dexter-

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ously seizing Mr. Bostock by the wrist and collar. "Come along, you!"

"I—I—I've had my clothes stolen!" gasped Mr. Bostock.

"Had yer—ha! ha! That's a good 'un," cried the sergeant. "Had his clothes stole!"

"Ha! ha!" echoed the other captor, catching Mr. Bostock's other arm; "that be a moighty good 'un, sergeant!"

"But I have, I tell you!" desperately wailed the victim.

"All right, me fine feller," grimly responded the sergeant; "you needn't make a song about them clothes. We've got 'em 'ere for ye all right. Come along!"

A flash of perplexed hope confused Mr. Bostock's faculties, and then, as he was led toward the cottage, a slatternly old woman appeared at the door.

"Yes!" cried the old woman shrilly, "that's the blaggard right enough. That's my shawl over his 'ed! An' my other frock! An' my boots! An'—an' what ha' ye done with my bonnet, you low thief? Sergeant, he's been an' sold my best bonnet!"

"What?" cried Mr. Bostock. "Are these things yours?"

"Course they are, impidence! Comin' into people's 'ouses a-night an' stealin' wittles, an'——"

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"Then I give that woman in charge!" interrupted Mr. Bostock. "She's stolen my clothes, and ten pounds, and a pocket-book, and my watch and chain!"

At this the old woman spluttered with rage, and the two policemen guffawed aloud. "You're a gay 'un, you are! There ain't no watch-pocket in *them* clothes! You shall have 'em, my boy—we're a-goin' to put 'em on ye afore we take ye back. Here y'are!"

With these words Mr. Bostock was forced in at the door of the cottage, and so to a room at the back.

"Here's yer clothes, my hearty," proceeded the sergeant; "and precious glad you'll be to get into 'em again, I don't think. Come along!"

With that he shut the door behind them, and presented to Mr. Bostock's astounded eyes—a suit of drabbish yellow, decorated with black "broad arrows"! Nothing but the uniform of the convict prison!

Mr. Bostock stared wildly. Was this some frenzied nightmare, or was he really stark mad?

He gabbled incoherently. "No, no—stole my clothes—bathing—not them—name of Bostock—refer to my bankers—no—it's all a mistake!" And then he stopped, with open mouth, as the state of the case dawned on him slowly.

Some wretched convict had escaped and left these things. He had entered the cottage in

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the night for food, had gone off disguised in the only clothes he could find, and had wandered, hiding in lonely places, till he had reached the sea-shore. And then he had made another change, at Mr. Bostock's expense!

And, indeed, that was exactly what had happened. And the curiosity of the police at Beachpool, the chase, and now the final capture—all were due to that invaluable invention, the telephone.

"Come along—into 'em!" urged the sergeant, with the horrible clothes in his hand. "You was precious anxious about 'em just now. Or shall we shove 'em on for ye?"

"No, no, I tell you—it's a mistake. Take me to Scarbourn—no, wire to Cornhill! I'll give you five pounds—ten—fifty!" Poor Mr. Bostock struggled to his feet and feebly made for the door.

The succeeding quarter of an hour is too painful for description. But at its expiration Mr. Bostock was led forth in convict garb—it was very tight, but in the flush of their triumph the village police force of two suspected nothing from that—and pushed into a light cart with a fast horse, in presence of the whole population of the village. All that his struggle had gained for him was the distinction and interest, in the popular eye, of being very firmly handcuffed.

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The horse was whipped up and the village was left behind, which at any rate was some relief. Twenty minutes' smart drive brought the party within distant sight of Scarbourn, and within very near sight of an open carriage, which they rapidly overtook. Mr. Bostock's disorganized faculties were barely beginning to rearrange themselves, but he *did* recognize that carriage, and the people in it. With a gasp he slid off the seat, to hide himself in the bottom of the cart.

"Hold up!" exhorted the constable, hauling at his arm. "Sergeant! he's tryin' to hide from them ladies in the carriage! P'r'aps he's had somethink o' theirs!"

The sergeant gazed down on the cowering form, and then gave the horse an extra flick. "P'r'aps he has," he said. "We'll ask 'em."

And thus it came about that Mr. Bostock, grimy, bruised, handcuffed, and bedizened with broad-arrows, was hauled up from the bottom of the cart and presented for identification to the horrified gaze of Mrs. Bostock, Miss Bostock, Miss Julia Bostock, Mrs. Berkeley Wiggs, and the coachman on the box.

After that nothing mattered. The handsome apologies of the prison governor were a mockery, for Mr. Bostock would have preferred to stay with him.

THE HOUSE OF HADDOCK

ROBOSHOBERRY DOVE hauled at the twist-knotted cord by his side till his enormous silver watch emerged from its fob. According to immemorial ritual he banged the long-suffering timepiece three times edgewise on the socket of his wooden leg, clapped it to his ear, and finally looked at the face, comparing it with that of the old sun-dial over the church door behind us.

“ ’Taren’t to be judged the sun’s nigh two hours out, so ’tis like it may be the watch,” he said. “An’ none so much out, nayther, considerin’. ’Tis a wunnerful good watch for all its an oad ’un.”

“Your father’s, wasn’t it?” I asked, indolently.

“My father gave fi’ pun’ for that watch, sir, at Foulness, before eighteen hundred.” For this conversation took place a good many years ago, when I was a very young person and Roboshoberry Dove was not so many years short of ninety, tough old fellow as he was. “He gave fi’ pun’ for it of a man whose father had been a genelman once.”

We were sitting on the tombstone before the

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church door; the tombstone that had served so many purposes since it had ceased, by reason of illegibility, to keep its charge as a memorial. For it was scored and worn by scythe-blades, it made a convenient waiting-place opposite the church door and the dial, and, if you turned your back on the church, as we had done, you looked out upon what always seemed to me the most wonderful view on earth; over the tumbling roofs of the little town below and so across the five miles' width of sea that makes the outer gate of the Thames. It was said that the level stone had had other uses too; it had been found adapted to certain profane games, in which buttons and halfpennies had their parts; but that was in the old days, before people were all good.

"Ay," repeated Roboshobery Dove, "his father had been a genelman once, an' his father before him, in Foulness, like others I could tell."

"The Doves, eh?" I suggested.

"That I won't say, sir, though true 'tis I was christened after Roboshobery Dove as fit for King Charles agin Crom'ell. ' 'Tis arl a possibility,' says the parson to my father, 'that you be descendants, an' 'tis a fine handsome name.' An' so he christened me. That were Master Ellwood. He were a parson o' th' oad sort, were he. Wore silver buckles to his breeches, an' slep' in his wig; an' his walkin' stick were five foot long."

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I had heard Roboshobery so describe Parson Ellwood more than once before; and experience told me that the old seaman was groping his mind for a story. So I waited.

"Speakin' o' oad families come down, an' likewise speakin' o' Crom'ell," he said at length, "folk'll tell 'ee mostly, when things is broke in a church, as 'twere Crom'ell's sogers did it. Leastways that's what ye hear in these parts. But 'taren't so—not allus. You know the Haddock monument in the church, with the head off? Well I count they'll lay that to Crom'ell's sogers, but 'tweren't. I knew the oad soger as did that, an' he were none o' Crom'ell's; far from a soger at all, sarten to say. I'll tell 'ee his courtin' tale, if you like."

"A courting tale? That's new. You never told me one of your own."

Roboshobery Dove closed one bright blue eye for a full quarter of a minute. "Bin a bacheldor all my life," he said. Then he opened the closed eye and shut the other.

"Very well," I said. "Go on."

"The Haddock as that monument was to," Dove proceeded, "was him as built the alms-houses. It were a big family once—admirals an' knights an' what not: but the one as left the alms-houses were nayther, though a rich man, 'tis doubtless. I dunno how many years 'tis since they were rich, but I count it's hundreds;

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an' now there's none on 'em, rich or poor."

So much I had myself read in the county history, where the family, once the greatest in these parts, was noted as extinct.

"There's no more of 'em," the old man pursued, "an' I knowed the last. He were a long way from knight or admiral, or even rich man, though he were a bit of a miser in his way. Jim Haddock were his name—oad Jim Haddock, as mostly called—an' he got his livin' one way an' another with a bit o' field-work here an' there an' a bit o' higglin' in between, him keepin' fowls. His father before him had been a hedger, and his gran'father too, like as not; but oad Jim couldn't forget as the family had been gentry once, an' he didn't let nobody else forget it, nayther. The taproom weren't good enough for he; he'd sit in the parlor o' the Ship here, or the Castle, up at Hadleigh, an' wait to be asked to drink. If nobody offered him rum, he'd take sixpenny ale—nothin' lower. An' he'd sniff over the pot an' screw his mouth, like as 'twere an insult he were swallerin'.

" 'Tis a wicked thing to think on,' he'd say, 'me here drinkin' six-ale as was born by rights to be drunk on port wine every night o' my life, like any other genelman. Ah well! Human greatness be a passin' show!' But he'd go on a-sniffin' an' drinkin' the sixpenny just as long as you'd go on payin' for it, an' longer. An'

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the next man 'ud hear a deal of his mighty grievance agin you, because 'tweren't better drink.

"When he sold ten eggs once an' got three-pence for 'em, same as any other man was glad to get in them days, he went half round the parish with the money in his open hand before him, callin' the world to witness his hainish afflictions, whereby he'd a-bin give only three dirty coppers for ten eggs, like any common feller. He would ha' gone all round 'stead of half, but the half-way came down on Leigh Strand there, an' a chap three sheets in the wind fetches him a lift under the hand with a boat-stretcher as sent the coppers flyin' across the quay, an' he never found more'n one of 'em.

"He never complained in that exact way afterwards, but he complained just as much. He got back that twopence an' a deal more, one way an' another. He used to forget to give change whenever you'd let him, an' talk wide an' noble about the word of a genelman if you tried to putt it right. His idea of a share in a harvestin' job was to draw summat on account, an' then sit on a beer-barr'l an' tell the master how the work ote to be done, very condescendin'.

"But the wust of all his troubles, the most hainish grievance oad Jim Haddock ever had, were the alms-houses. It grieved him sick to

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see a bit o' freehold ground an' twelve cottages as had belonged to some great gran' father of his, about ten times removed, bein' lived in by other parties, an' him a-looking on an' gettin' nothen' out on't. He thote over it an' he grieved over it, an' he thote over it again, till at last he went to the rector. 'Twere the rector and churchwardens, you understand, as had the management of the alms-houses, by will of oad Jerry Haddock. 'Twere a huntin' day when oad Jim went to the rectory, an' the rector were waitin' for his hoss to be brote round, an' gettin' impatient.

"'Good-morning sir,' says oad Jim. 'I been a-thinkin' over the matter o' them alms-houses.'

"'Oh, you have, have you?' says the rector, cockin' his eye.

"'I have,' says oad Jim, very firm an' decided. 'I've been a-considerin' the matter very deep. It seems to me as how my fam'ly has been out o' that there property long enough. I don't want to be hard on nobody, but the circumstances o' the fam'ly ain't what they was! so I'm compelled to give notice. I'll thank 'ee to clear out all them oad parties, parson, by quarter day.'

"'What the rector said ain't quite sarten. I've heard different accounts, an' none of 'em ain't what you might expect from a parson, these here days. But that rector were one o' th' oad sort,

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an' anyhow what he did *is* sarten. He took oad Jim by the scruff o' the neck an' he runned him out o' the rectory garden that fast that he den't stop till he hit up agen this here churchyard fence.

"Oad Jim Haddock took it bitter unkind o' the parson, an' complained most touchin' to everybody as 'ud listen. 'Tweren't the way for one genelman to treat another, he said; the proper way, when two gentlemen couldn't agree on a matter o' business, was to split the difference; an' he'd a been very well satisfied with half the alms-houses.

"Well, he went on complainin' very woeful; but seein' he couldn't do no better he settled with hisself at last to get one o' the houses in the reg'lar way. You know what it says—it's up in the church—about the alms-houses bein' for decayed parishioners, men an' women, married an' single. Well, oad Jim were pretty sound an' able for work, an' not quite what you might look for in an alms-house, but he reckoned his fam'ly claims 'ud get over that. The houses were allus full, but there were one poor oad chap named Styles in one, about eighty-five, with a stroke down one side an' a cough that joggled him to bits, an' oad Jim counted his house as good as took, in a month or two. He went in, most wonnerful affectionate, every day, to see how poor oad Styles were a-gettin' on, an' to slap him

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very hard on the back when he coughed, an' tell him how much wuss he was a-lookin'.

"Oad Styles lasted about a month longer than Jim expected, but he went arter all, an' then there was another disappointment, for instead o' oad Jim they putt a widder into the house. Not so partic'lar oad a widder, neither; but she'd had two husbands, an 'tis like they counted she wouldn't easy get a third. But anyhow oad Jim Haddock went half-cracked. He said a mort of unrespectful things about oad Jerry Haddock wasting the fam'ly substance in riotous alms-houses, an' then he went to the rector again. The rector den't run him out this time; oad Jim runned hissself when the parson grabbed his walkin'-stick. So when he found it was no good tryin' that way, he set out to see the widder herself.

"'Good-morning, Mrs. Bartrip,' say he, sniffin' an' snuffin' an' screwin' his nose. 'Umf! umf! Be you decayed?'

"'*What?*' says the widder, lookin' very hard at him.

"'I were only makin' inquisition,' says he, a bit milder. 'The rules o' the will says decayed parishioners, an' I felt a bit anxious about 'ee. If so be you ben't decayed I doubt the parson 'll be after turnin' 'ee out. He be terr'ble strict, the parson. An' the churchwardens too. 'Tis a very serious punishment, by Parliament act, for

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livin' here if you ben't decayed. But there—I make no doubt you be 'cordin' to rules, Mrs. Bartrip.'

" 'I be 'cordin' enough to rules to stay where I am,' says the widder.

" 'Ah, no doubt,' says oad Jim. 'The pity is 'tis knowed all over the parish. Can't help it, ye see, livin' here, 'cordin' to rules. Though 'tain't what a party 'ud like knowed an' talked about. Still, no doubt 'tis what parties come to, gettin' so far on in years.'

" 'Is't, indeed?' says the widder, liftin' her chin.

" 'Ah, they do. Not that there's anythin' to be ashamed of in a few years more or less, for a sensible woman. When you get to sixty, ten years here or there don't make much difference.'

" 'What do I know about sixty?' says the widder.

" 'Oh, I'm not tryin' to bind ye to sixty, Mrs. Bartrip; far from it. Sixty or seventy makes nothen', as I said, an' some decays later'n others. Poor oad Styles, now, he were late. Some thote 'twere the house bein' unhealthy; an' sarten to say he were terr'ble bad toward the end. But he lasted fair well, did poor oad Styles. He were over two year here, an' I count ye might last quite as long as that, if the house don't get no damper. An' that wouldn't seem easy possible, 'tis sarten.'

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“ ‘Ah!’ says Mrs. Bartrip, ‘a damp house suits me wonnerful; allus did.’ ”

“ ‘Well, all was for nothen’. Mrs. Bartrip wouldn’t move for pride, nor for wish to be thote young, nor for damp. So oad Jim waited a month an’ tried her with ghosts. ”

“ ‘Good-mornin’, Mrs. Bartrip,’ says he. ‘I wondered if you mightn’t be ill, seein’ a light in your keepin’ room so late last night.’ ”

“ ‘Light in my keepin’ room?’ says the widder. ‘Why, I weren’t up after dark.’ ”

“ ‘Indeed, mum? Then it must ha’ been oad Styles agen. I’ve seed him about the garden two or three nights, but I den’t think best to say nothen’, you bein’ a lone woman an’ like as not nervous o’ ghosts; I never guessed he’d ha’ gone indoors.’ ”

“ ‘I wouldn’t ha’ guessed it either,’ says the widder. ”

“ ‘But ’tis allus that way with them alms-houses,’ says oad Jim. ‘The oad parties do cling to ’em wonnerful.’ ”

“ ‘Don’t blame ’em,’ says the widder. ”

“ ‘It’s allus been the way, mum. Allus the way in that row o’ houses. If the property had still been in the family I’d ha’ had it attended to long ago, along with the plaster. But as it is, there’s oad Styles a-walking the house all silent every night.’ ”

“ ‘Well, that’s fust-rate,’ says the widder. ‘I ”

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allus did like a ghost in the house, specially a silent one. It's company, an' it don't tell no lies.'

"Anybody but oad Jim would ha' give up the job after that. But he never give up nothen' he could hoad on to, an' fore long he were round at the widder's again. This time he didn't try to drive her out. He saw that weren't to be done, so he split the difference (like a gentleman) an' tried to get in without. He never brought up a word o' what had been said before, 'cept that the widder liked company; an' as company he recommended hisself very strong, to say nothen' of protection from ghosts. An' the end of it was they were married.

"The parson laughed half an hour by the clock when they went to put up the banns, an' he congratulated oad Jim Haddock on enterin' into the ancestral property at last. As to the weddin' there never was no sich fanteeg in all these parts. You wouldn't ha' believed there was half as many tin pots in Essex. The parson he set 'em a weddin' breakfast on his own lawn, an' had all the rest o' the alms-house people to help eat it. All that day they was squire an' lady, an' oad Jim Haddock was such a swell he might ha' fancied hisself his own great-gran'-father ten times back.

"But next mornin' he were seen choppin' fire-wood very early, which wasn't like his reg'lar habits. What had been said or done to cause it

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nobody knew, but 'twas whispered what happened when Madam Haddock showed herself at last.

“ ‘Husband,’ says she, sittin’ easy in th’ arm-chair, ‘I be a decayed oad ’ooman. Wash down that doorstep.’ ”

“Oad Jim made fare to object, but she grabbed the broom that sudden he changed his mind. An’ there began a little crowd by the door to see oad Jim a-cleanin’ a doorstep; an’ the crowd growed an’ growed for half an hour before Mrs. Haddock were quite satisfied with the job.

“Then says she, sittin’ easy as ever in the arm-chair: ‘I be an oad’ ooman o’ seventy, or mayhap eighty, ten years more or less not matterin’; so I need plenty o’ rest. Peel you them taters for dinner.’ ”

“She lied the broom across her knee, handy-like, an’ oad Jim went an’ did what she bid. ’Twere guessed as he’d tasted of that broom earlier in the mornin’, ’fore he chopped the firewood. So he peeled the taters an’ putt’ ’em in the pot, an’ the bacon with ’em like as ordered.

“Then says she: ‘I be such a worn-out oad ’ooman, an’ this here house be that damp an’ unwholesome I ain’t done no washin’ since fust the banns was putt up. Start up the copper-fire an’ go to washin’ the’ linen.’ ”

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"So she began with him an' so she went on, till poor oad Jim Haddock wished he'd never been born a genelman at all. She sat all day in the easy-chair an' never let go the broom, 'cept she made him sweep with it. He scrubbed an' cooked an' washed an' mended an' got nothin' by it but chin-music an' broomstick, turn about. An' that weren't all nayther. He had to work outdoor as well as in. She druv him out with his eggs an' fowls, an' she saw she got the money too, every farden; an' 'tween whiles she found him odd jobs round about, an' drawed his wages herself. Poor oad Jim was clean broke down, an' hardly mentioned his ancestral family once in a week.

"One day the beadle's wife falls ill, an' the rector sends round for Mrs. Haddock to go an' sweep out the church. So she turns to oad Jim an' says: 'There be a job o' sweepin' up to church; get along quick an' do it while I sit in this here unhealthy house an' keep out the ghosts. An' mind I don't get no complaints from parson about it when I go up for the money in the evenin'.'

"Well, he comes up to the church quiet an' humble, an' meets the parson in the porch, an' when the parson sees him, broom an' all, he laughs nigh as much as he did before the weddin'. ' 'Pon my soul, 'tis too bad of her,' says the parson, 'but I dunno as you don't deserve it.

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'Twouldn't be much of an admiral they'd make o' you!

"Oad Jim went in an' he started sweepin' humble an' quiet enough. But his heart were pretty bitter in him, an' the parson's words den't help it. So he went on a-sweepin' till he came opposite oad Jerry Haddock's monument, an' there were oad Jerry, his great-gran'father ten times over, as had caused all the trouble, smilin' down at him, blind an' contempshus. That roused oad Jim at last.

" 'I dussen't strike my wife,' he says, 'an' the parson be a man o' scorn an' wrath. But you can't hit me back,' he says. An' with that he swings round the broom an' ketches oad Jerry Haddock sich a lift under the ear that the head flied clean down the chancel, an' they found it in the font next christenin' day!"

A LUCIFO MATCH

PERSONS with a choice of several names are not common outside the peerage; but some of them—wholly unconnected with any peer—are to be discovered in London crowds, though discovery is not what they are there for. Crowds, in fact, attract them, from the circumstances that whatever the number of individuals in a crowd there are sure to be several times that number of pockets, mostly with something in them; and a pickpocket who has once been convicted finds a change of name a wise precaution. So we arrive at Johnson.

It chanced that Johnson stood in quite a small crowd—perhaps of twenty—that stared at a shop-window in Oxford Street. He had only been Johnson for a week, poor fellow, since emerging from some months' retirement, and as yet the name did not sit easily. He had to keep it continually in mind, lest in some unforeseen emergency he might call himself Jones, or Barker, or Jenkinson, any one of which was dangerous, and had been discarded in its turn for that reason; always after just such another holiday as that he had lately disenjoyed.

Johnson was a mild person—not at all the

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sort of man whom one might suppose to be a pickpocket—which was fortunate, of course, for Johnson. He was a meek, rather timid body, whose tastes would have been domestic if he had been a family man; and he would have been a family man if it were not for the expense. He was temperate, thrifty, and inoffensive; he shrank with horror from the idea of anything violent, such as burglary or work; he had no vices, no particular abilities, and only one small talent: he could pick a pocket very well indeed. Altogether, Johnson was an unusually virtuous thief.

He stood in a small crowd in Oxford Street, as I have said, and while the small crowd stared at the shop window because of some new idea of the shopkeeper's, Johnson considered pockets according to ideas of his own; having a natural human preference for the easiest pocket in the most sumptuous habiliment. He felt himself much drawn toward a man in an "immensikoff"—a fur-lined overcoat—which was quite the most magnificent garment in the crowd. The large side-pocket of the "immensikoff" gaped invitingly, and, though outside overcoat-pockets were barren vessels as a rule, this was so very easy that it were wasting a chance not to try it. So Johnson placed himself against the pocket and tried, with unexpected success.

For indeed, at the bottom of that pocket

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reposed a purse—not at all what one might expect to find there. In an instant that purse was transferred to the outside pocket, so closely adjacent, of Johnson's light overcoat; and then Johnson paused for a moment, ostentatiously scratching his cheek with the guilty hand, and staring with rapt eyes at the window; till he judged it expedient to edge gently away and evaporate from the little crowd.

He strolled easily to the next turning, turned up it with quicker steps, and so into a quieter cross street. Here he paused, plunged his hand into his side-pocket, and—found it empty.

His chin fell, and he stood amazed. There was no doubt of it—this was the pocket into which he had dropped the purse, and now there was nothing there. He felt in the opposite pocket—needlessly, for he clearly remembered working with his right hand, and with his right side-pocket against the left pocket of the “*imensikoff*.” There was nothing now in either of his side-pockets, though he raked them through with anxious fingers. And then everything inside him bounced at the sudden touch of a hand on his shoulder. He shrank and turned, and found himself confronted by the man in the fur-lined coat.

The man was grinning at him with sardonic politeness, and Johnson did not like him at all. He was tall and broad and dark, while Johnson

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was small and narrow and pale. The stranger's black moustache was waxed into long spikes, which pointed toward the outer edges of the flat brim of a very tall hat, and gave a touch of the unearthly to his grin; and in his hand he extended toward Johnson a metal box—Johnson's own tobacco-box, in truth, which he now remembered to have left in that same side coat-pocket.

"How de do?" said the sardonic stranger. "Were you feeling in your pocket for this?"

Johnson's panic impulse was to deny his tobacco-box utterly, but the stranger's black eyes were piercing his very brain, and he felt it useless. He took the box that was forced on him, and gasped unintelligible acknowledgments. He meant to say that he was extremely obliged, and didn't know he had dropped it; but he never remembered what he did say.

"I believe some sneaking thief picked your pocket," said the stranger, his grin growing fiercer. "Open it and see if anything's missing."

Johnson began a mumble that it was all right and of no consequence and didn't matter, but the eyes and the satanic grin compelled him, and he sprang the lid. Instantly there arose from within a gigantic creature with horns, which ran across his hand on horrid clawed legs and made for his sleeve. Johnson squeaked like a rat, and flung box and insect to the ground together. He

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had a feminine horror of crawling things, and had never seen a stag-beetle before.

The stranger snatched the box as it fell, and, brushing roughly against Johnson, skilfully scooped up the insect from the pavement.

"What?" he said. "Do you mean to say it wasn't yours at all! And yet you wanted to take it? Is there anything else in those pockets of yours that doesn't belong to you? Show me!"

"No, sir! Nothing at all, sir, upon my solemn davy!" wailed Johnson in terror. For the eyes and the grin were fiercer than ever. "Nothing at all, sir!" protested Johnson, pulling out the pocket-linings. And there, as the right-hand pocket came inside out, emerged the stranger's purse!

"Liar!" cried the dark man. "Thief! That is my purse!"

He snatched it away and opened it, while Johnson stood helpless in amazement, with his pockets protruding on each side.

"See!" pursued the stranger, thrusting the open purse under his nose. "My purse, with my money in it! What about that?"

Instinct brought a jumbled defence to Johnson's lips. "Quite a mistake—wouldn't think of such a thing, being a gentleman himself. Accident that might happen to anybody—a lot of trouble in the family lately"—and so on.

"What's your name?" snapped the stranger.

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It disconcerted Johnson more than anything else to see that this fiendish person was grinning more than ever, while his unavoidable eyes seemed to divine more about Johnson than even Johnson ever knew. "What's your name?" he demanded.

"Jones!" spluttered the thief, in a panic. "Barker!—no, Jenkinson—I mean Johnson!"

"Oh, I see," the stranger replied; and now his moustache and his grin chased each other to the very tips of his ears. "I see; Jones, *alias* Barker, *alias* Jenkinson, and at present Johnson. Last conviction under the name Jenkinson, eh?"

"'Twasn't exactly a conviction, sir, I assure you," protested the sweating pickpocket. "The judge's mistake entirely—quite a misunderstanding; and the commonest watch you ever see; not worth a bob!"

"And what did you get? A year?"

"No, sir—nothing of the kind. It's a wicked slander, sir, when anybody says it was a year. Not a day more than nine months, I give you my solemn word!"

"After a dozen previous convictions?"

"No sir—that's another slander; anybody as told you that is trying to take my character away. There wasn't more than seven, sir, or eight at the very most. It's 'ard to be scandalized like that, sir!"

"Shocking!" The stranger had slipped his

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purse away and now had his hand on Johnson's shoulder, with finger and thumb taking a good nip of his coat-collar. "Only seven or eight convictions! Poor chap; you shall have another at once. Come along!"

"No, indeed, sir—let me alone! On my solemn davy, sir, it was all a mistake. I dunno how the purse got there!" And it surprised Johnson to find himself offering an excuse with such a deal of truth in it.

The stranger's grin relaxed a little, and his voice grew more business-like. "Very well," he said. "Come with me for an hour and I won't charge you. But don't you displease me, my virtuous friend!" The grin flickered up again. "Don't you displease me, or you'll go back to as long a dose of gaol as I can get for you, mind that! You shall buy your release on my terms. Come along; but first stuff those pockets in again."

Johnson obeyed, and walked by the side of his persecutor in a maze of sickening bewilderment. Could he be really awake? The whole thing was uncommonly like a hideous nightmare, down to the very beetle. He had the most distinct recollection of his shock of surprise at finding his coat-pockets empty; yet he *had* put the purse there, and there it proved to be after all. The thing was the more like a dream, because his efforts to remember made it all seem

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like something that had occurred a long time ago. And he would doubtless have believed it a nightmare and made some desperate effort to wake himself, were it not for the fact that the gloating stranger most palpably had him by the arm as they walked through the back streets, and now and again put a question of such a pungent and penetrating nature that demanded all Johnson's waking wits to meet it. Such wits as Johnson had were barely sufficient for the needs of his trade, and now they were oppressed by a feeling that he was being "got at" in some unfathomable manner; for indeed the satanic stranger chuckled gaily to himself as the torment went on.

Their way led through numerous back streets, which Johnson was too disconcerted to recognize, even if he knew them; and at last they stopped before a very blank and secret-looking door in a tall building that had no more than two other openings in it, and those windows, small and high.

The stranger opened the door with a latch-key, never looking at the key, but always at Johnson, with that embarrassing grin unaltered, unless it were now a little less fierce and a little more whimsical. The door revealed nothing but a dark passage, into which Johnson was pushed without ceremony. The place smelt damp, and on the whole strikingly like a cell in a police-

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station; a fact which gave the prisoner's terrors a more definite turn. The door closed behind them and left them wholly in the dark; and Johnson, seized by the arm, was thrust stumbling and staggering along the passage till he emerged on a spot only a degree less obscure, where nothing was discernible but some vast construction of square beams that vanished into blackness above. Here the stranger paused, and groping in the gloom among the beams, flung open another door.

"Get in there," he said, "and sit down. I shan't want you for an hour. You can go to sleep if you like."

Johnson obediently stumbled into the dark opening, and the door slammed behind him with a bang and a sharp click. It was black—blacker than ever, but at least he was alone for a space, and might collect his faculties. He reached about him, and had no difficulty in finding the walls of his prison, for in fact they were scarce a yard apart in any direction. It seemed that he was in a wooden cupboard, with a ledge for seat. He sat on the ledge and wondered.

Imprisonment was not wholly a novelty, though this was certainly the darkest cell he had ever inhabited, and the smallest. There was to be an hour's respite, it seemed, but he was mighty uneasy as to what would happen at the end of the hour. He thought again of that

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horrible beetle, and the clothes tingled on his skin at the recollection, till he began to rub himself all over. Heavens! if there were more of them in this place! He jumped to his feet, shook himself and stamped, and then bethought him of his match-box. He found it and split it, stooped for it hurriedly, butted his head into one side of the cupboard and his opposite end into another, and came to the floor in a heap.

“Now then, keep quiet in there!”

The voice was a strange one—certainly not that of the dark man—and it came from—where? Nowhere about him, but apparently from somewhere above, though even of this he was not certain. Surely there was no possibility that he could be watched in this unspeakable darkness. He groped painfully, found a match, groped again and found the box to strike it on.

The light was a great relief, for it revealed the fact that at least the place was free from visible insects. He could see now that his cell was wooden—top, bottom, and sides; and then came burned fingers and sudden darkness. He lit another match, and satisfied himself that there was no cranny, nor even a keyhole, through which peeping was possible; then he lit another to pick up those remaining, and another after that.

“Now then!” came the voice again. “Leave off strikin’ them matches!”

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Johnson stopped, bumped his head again, and scrambled to his seat. Then he found courage to speak. "I say——" he began.

"You stow that row, d'y'ear? Shut up."

The prisoner said no more, but waited. Strange noises reached his ear from some far-away part of the building, and a little nearer there were subdued creakings. He began to remember stories of mysterious rooms that closed up and crushed men imprisoned in them; of weighted ceilings that fell; of chambers slowly filled with poisonous gas. As he sat he began to tremble; and as the minutes passed he felt himself growing desperate with fear. He wished he had allowed himself to be handed to the police, for at least he knew what that meant. But now—he could not endure much longer. He had made up his mind, come what might, to shout his loudest for help; when, as he stood feeling the hundredth time for the door-fastening, he was suddenly flung backward and down, confusedly realizing that the cupboard was shooting upward bodily. Was the thing a lift?

It stopped with a jerk, and the prisoner, recovering his legs, was aware of a loud and now familiar voice. There was a tap on the door, and a click; and instantly it flew open, and Johnson was blinded by a flood of light and deafened by a roar of sound.

Hundreds of faces stared at him from a great

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hall, as many voices shouted a delighted greeting, and twice as many hands clapped loud applause. The cupboard stood open on a brilliantly lighted stage, and by it stood the sardonic stranger in evening dress, with a black wand in his hand; while Johnson, gasping and dishevelled, blinked and cowered helplessly.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” cried the conjurer, “I have the honor to introduce Mr. Johnson, *alias* Jones, *alias* Barker, *alias* Jenkinson, the eminent pickpocket. You will remember that when I enclosed the lady in the cabinet I promised you quite a new and original *dénouement* to the performance—something never before attempted. I think I have fulfilled my promise. Not only has the lady disappeared, but by an extraordinary application of occult natural forces I have brought into her place a pickpocket snatched this moment from his nefarious practices in Oxford Street. You observe his confusion? What more natural? But two minutes ago his hand was in the pocket of an eminent and distinguished gentleman, much like myself in appearance, seeking that gentleman’s purse. In an instant—whist! he finds himself placed before you on this stage, half a mile off. Ladies and gentlemen, it is just possible that some among you suspected the lady who disappeared of being a confederate of mine; but I defy any one of you to call this man a con-

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federate. Does he look like it? Does he look as though he came here on purpose? Has he the calm, self-possessed, happy, smiling appearance natural to any man who has the good fortune to be in my employment? Look at him. Some gentleman who has ever had his pocket picked may remember him; if any of you are connected with the police you are sure to know him. He has been brought up at half the police-courts in London and has been convicted at the Old Bailey and the Sessions House over and over again. He has just completed nine months' board and residence at this country's expense, under the name of Jenkinson; if he hadn't changed his name he'd have got more. Are you quite convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that he is not a confederate? Any test you like to suggest will be applied. Is there any lady present he has ever robbed who would like to stick a bonnet-pin into him? No? Don't hesitate—you are quite welcome, I assure you. Come now, I wish you would. You see, under the Employer's Liability Act I am liable for any injury occurring to people I employ, but I don't care what happens to this chap. Come now, let me persuade you. Isn't there any dear, kind lady present, who will oblige me by sticking a bonnet-pin into this criminal, just to oblige me? It doesn't matter whether he has robbed you or not—I don't mind. He'd rob you if he could, you know.

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Here he is." He seized the wretched Johnson by the collar, and thrust him forward. "I always find ladies very obliging," he went on. "*Surely* you won't all be so unkind as to refuse just to stick him with a bonnet-pin while I hold him? Just to help me convince the company, now?"

There were laughs and titters, and the conjurer whispered from behind: "All right, you fool, they won't do it." Then he proceeded, aloud: "You won't? Not one of you? Then I shall have to try something else. I'm always glad to introduce a novelty into my performance, and I'll think you'll admit that this is the first time a real live pickpocket has ever been brought upon the stage in this extraordinary manner. Having got him here it would be a pity to waste him, wouldn't it? Very well. I will proceed to try a little experiment with a view to showing how dishonesty would be dealt with in this country, if I were Prime Minister. Will any ladies and gentlemen in the company oblige me by the loan of a few small articles of value? A few rings, a watch, a gold pencil-case—anything of that sort, you know. I'm sure I shan't have to wait long for things like that with such a high-class audience as this. Come now—thank you, sir; a ring; a valuable diamond ring from a gentleman in the second row. Yes? Thank you, madam—a locket. A gold watch?

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I should like a gold watch—and so would Mr. Johnson, I am sure. Here it comes—thank you, sir. A gold pencil-case—two more rings, a chain, and a silver match-box; thank you—thank you. I think that will do; we mustn't risk too much on a first experiment, you know. Now I should like some gentleman from the company to assist me by placing these articles in Mr. Johnson's pockets, in full sight of the house. Will *you*, sir? Thank you; just step up here. Now, will you please take the articles one by one from the table, and place them separately in any of the criminal's pockets you choose. Well in sight of the company, mind. Stand a little aside—that's it—so that everything shall be perfectly clear. I need hardly assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that this gentleman is no confederate of mine. I do not invite you to test it by sticking a bonnet-pin into him—he is a good deal bigger than Johnson, and it might not be safe. I am sure you will accept his word of honor from a gentleman of his size."

The gentleman approached Johnson and followed the conjurer's instructions, and the conjurer, from a little way off, reported the bestowal of each article aloud. "Gold watch in right-hand waistcoat-pocket; diamond ring in left-hand waistcoat-pocket; chain in inside coat-pocket"; and so forth. As for Johnson, he began to feel a good deal happier. He resented the indigni-

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ties to which he had been subjected, of course, but, after all, he had expected something much worse than this. All the bewilderment and anxiety of the earlier part of the adventure were at an end now, and all was plain enough. The conjurer had scored heavily, it was true, and the effect of Johnson's appearance in the cabinet, aghast and panic-stricken, was something altogether beyond the possibilities of ordinary preparation and rehearsal. But Johnson's relief was immense, and now the novel experience of having his pockets voluntarily stuffed with valuables was rather pleasant than otherwise. Johnson was himself again, and vastly on the alert for fresh moves in the game.

The gentleman descended from the platform, and the conjurer came forward. "Now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "you have seen the articles safely—or shall we say unsafely?—placed in the thief's pockets. But to make everything perfectly plain, and to identify the owner of each, I will just rapidly run over them again. This ring, sir—you see it? You are sure you identify it? It is your property, and you will remember that it is in the left-hand waistcoat-pocket, where I carefully replace it, as you see. The watch—that is yours, sir; you may examine it again, if you please. No? Well, you will bear in mind that it is in the thief's right-hand waistcoat-pocket. There it is. This chain—the

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owner of this chain may see that no substitution has been made—is in the inside coat-pocket, on the left. Remember that, please.”

The company, vastly interested, watched the apparent return of each trinket, but Johnson knew better. Nothing but the conjurer’s fingers entered each pocket in turn, and nothing remained there at all. Somewhere within the breast of the conjurer’s coat was a spot over which his fingers flickered instantaneously after each pocket was done with; and when at last he turned away, ostentatiously dusting his fingers with his pocket-handkerchief after the contamination of Johnson, the handkerchief also flickered over that same spot. So much Johnson observed with eyes trained by use in all matters concerned with pockets.

The conjurer stepped between Johnson and the company, putting his pocket-handkerchief into his coat-tail pocket; and Johnson saw that something black went with it.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen,” said the conjurer, “the experiment I am about to make is one of the greatest interest to every law-abiding person. I propose to show you how, by proper scientific precautions known only to myself, all theft, all dishonesty, may be rendered ineffectual and useless.”

Gesticulating and bowing elegantly as he spoke, the conjurer stepped so closely before

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Johnson that only one thing could happen, and that was inevitable. Johnson had nothing but one small talent, as I have said; he could pick a pocket very well indeed—probably better than the conjurer. He picked one now. The black thing was a little velvet bag, soft and flat, as Johnson felt when it was safely in his own pocket. And the conjurer, with all eyes on him, went on.

“Just consider, now, how valuable my process would be to the Government of this country. Half the police force might be disbanded, and most of the magistrates pensioned off. People like our friend Johnson, *alias* Jones, *alias* Barker, *alias* Jenkinson, would have to turn honest, or starve. Now for the experiment.”

He turned and caught Johnson once more by the collar. “Here you see, is the pickpocket whom I brought straight out of Oxford Street by the exercise of the wonderful scientific law to which I have alluded. Here he is, with your valuables in his pockets, as you have observed with your own eyes. Now I shall send Johnson away—turn him out, kick him out—from this place, and let him run where he likes; and when he is gone I shall endeavor, by my scientific process, to bring your valuables back here, just as I brought Johnson himself, and restore them to you in a way that I hope will surprise you. Now Johnson, *alias* Jones, *alias* Barker, *alias*

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Jenkinson, out you go, and keep what you've got if you can! Ladies and gentlemen you will agree that I could not afford to kick a confederate—he would give me away. So as a guarantee of good faith I kick Johnson off the platform. Hall-porter! Run this man off the premises, and never let him come here again!"

He swung Johnson to the end of the platform, thrust him over the edge with hand and foot, and stood bowing and waving his wand as the porter bundled the victim out. "Good-bye, Mr. Johnson!" cried the conjurer; "good-bye! Run as hard as ever you can!"

As soon as Johnson reached the street he obeyed this order with all the strength of his legs, barely observing from the corner of his eye that the front of the hall was covered with posters announcing afternoon and evening performances by the great Lucifo, the Wizard of Andalusia. And when he had run some distance he turned into a dark entry and there disentangled from the velvet bag the gold watch, the three rings, the chain, the gold pencil-case, and the silver match-box.

"He was mighty anxious," reflected Johnson, "for some proof that I wasn't his pal. Well, he's got it now, and I hope he's satisfied."

For some days Johnson never ventured out till after dark; but his days at home were not dull, for he had bought a small collection of

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newspapers; wherefrom he derived solace and chuckles, as he read and read again under the headings: "Riotous Scene at an Entertainment," "Extraordinary Occurrence at St. Basil's Hall," "Serious Attack on a Conjuror"; and, in the case of an irresponsible halfpenny evening paper, "Lucifo Lamentably Left."

ARTS AND CRAFTS

IN the early fifties a stranger in the parlor of the Castle Inn at Hadleigh was rarity enough, but a stranger sleeping in the house for two nights was almost beyond precedent. But at the time of this tale the stranger was there, visible at a great distance because of his size and the redness of his face, and audible farther because of a very assertive and persistent voice, too large even for the man. The man was Mr. Peter Fossett of Kelvedon, who had come to take over a stock of sheep; and on the evening of his arrival the parlor at the Castle was so full of Mr. Peter Fossett that the more regular company seemed to be squeezed into the corners. Even Abel Pennyfather was less noisy and less boastful. Old Harry Prentice and Banham the carrier were much impressed, but the waggish sparkle of Dan Fisk's squint waxed as the evening wore on.

The stranger ("foreigner" was the word among the older Hadleigh people) was a farmer exceptionally well-to-do by the merit of his fathers before him. He had ridden the thirty miles on a handsome mare, with a man to drive the sheep back, and while the master took his ease with brandy-and-water in the parlor, the

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man took beer and dispensed information in the taproom. It was not so much of his possessions and his prosperity that Mr. Peter Fossett talked in the parlor—that matter expanded freely enough from the man in the taproom—but of his most amazing sagacity and unbounded smartness; whereof he had many anecdotes, not always clear in front, though all unfailingly satisfactory to Mr. Fossett, and mightily redounding to his glory and triumph.

“I ha’n’t been a-nigh Hadleigh afore in my life,” said Mr. Fossett, unflaggingly providing the conversation and keeping it to the same subject. “Never before, though I’m turned o’ thirty. I’m a Kelvedon man, an’ I’ve took a rise out o’ some of ’em in most parts of Essex—ah, an’ London too, once or twice—an’ now I’ve come here. You’ve got an oad chap here I mean to have a look at, ’fore I go back. I’ve heard a deal of him here an’ there about Essex; him they call Cunning Murrell, I mean.”

“Ah, Cunning Murrell, eh?” interjected Dan Fisk, scenting amusement. “If you’ve come here to take a rise out o’ he, you’d better stop a bit an’ rent a house.”

Mr. Fossett turned his beefy face slowly toward Dan Fisk’s corner. “Ho!” he said, with a voice of vast scorn, “you’re one o’ them as believes in him, I count?”

Dan beamed gently. “Ay, sarten to say,” he

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admitted, "Cunning Murrell be a monsus clever man."

"Herbs an' cures an' surveyin'," murmured Banham.

"Witchcraft an' things stole," Prentice added, with a shake of the head.

"Fortunes in the stars," added Jobson.

"An' wisions in a pail," said another. "Sayin' nothen' o' warts cured overnight."

"Ah! Fortunes in the stars an' wisions in a pail!" blared the stranger contemptuously. "A monsus clever man, sarten to say—for Hadleigh!"

"Cunnin' Murr'll be knowed arl over Essex an' farther," maintained Jobson.

"Ay, true enough. Fools an' their gammick go everywhere. Your oad Murrell may be mighty clever for Hadleigh, but he wouldn't do for Kelvedon—not he! Not with me at home, he wouldn't! 'Tis sarten he seems to come it over you mighty easy, but I hoada pound he can't come over me! Not he! I'm going to have a look at this oad curiosity with his fortun'-tellin' an' wisions in buckets. He don't come over me with such truck!"

"Ay, I count you be a man not easy took in, Master Fossett, sir," cooed Dan Fisk, in honeyed tones, whereat anybody who knew Dan would have taken warning. But the stranger knew not Dan, and went on vaingloriously.

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"Ay, I count I be," he said. "You needn't take it from me—ask anywhere I'm knowed. Lord, I dunno where I'd be if I weren't. Why I'd ha' bin married, for one thing, long afore this. But I ain't!"

"Ah," murmured Dan, "I count there be a mortal great competition."

"Ay, mayhap," answered Mr. Fossett, complacently, "though 'taren't my ways to talk o' that. But I ain't met man or woman yet as could get the better o' me, an' I've a-been about the world a bit, too—twice in London, an' Ipswich an' Colchester—an' I've larned a sight too much to be took in by such oad fellars as this here Murrell o' yourn."

"Well," observed Prentice, "he ha'n't tried to take you in yet."

"True 'tis," replied Fossett, "though I most mighty wish he would! Ay, I count I'd like him to try!"

"'Tis easy enough to let him try," remarked Dan Fisk; "easy enough if you ben't afeared of him."

"Afeared of him! Do I fare afeared of him? An—oad—oad—why, I'll show him up afore ye all! I'll make ye laugh at him, here in Hadleigh, that I will! If he ben't afeared to face me, that is!"

"Oh, he'll see ye, if ye go businesslike in the

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mornin'. He's not to know his mortal danger. 'Tis a cur'ous venture!"

"I'll go! I'll hev a joke on oad Murrell!"

And so between the doubts of the rest and the careful management of Dan Fisk, alternately flattering and challenging, Mr. Peter Fossett was brought to promise a vast exposure of Murrell on the morrow. And by the time he had gone to bed he had been brought to hint darkly at schemes of preternatural sagacity whereby the whole Murrell superstition should be exposed to the eternal derision of Essex, beginning at Hadleigh itself; and generally to proclaim Cunning Murrell already a vanquished humbug.

Nevertheless he went to bed far fuller of brandy-and-water than of schemes, and woke in the morning with no schemes at all. Indeed, Mr. Fossett was not a man of invention, though he was none the less self-confident on that account. He finished his large breakfast, stretched his large limbs, and rolled out into Hadleigh street resolved to gratify his curiosity by a call on Cunning Murrell, and in no sort doubtful of his ability to put the wise man's inventions to rout. His scheme should come, he promised himself, when he heard what Murrell had to say. And so it did.

It was scarce a score of lazy steps to Murrell's cottage, in the little black row that stood almost by the side of the inn garden. Mr. Fossett's

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lusty rap brought a high-pitched call of "Come yow in!" and with that he clicked the latch and met Cuning Murrell.

The little old man sat at a little table, and the whole room about him was hung and stacked with dried herbs in bundles. Murrell's eyes, sharp and quick as a weasel's, ran the length of Mr. Fossett top to toe.

"Shut the door and sit," said Murrell sharply, pointing to a chair, "and tell me your business."

Mr. Fossett, in no way abashed by this abruptness, dropped into the chair, spread his legs and rolled his head waggishly.

"No, no, Master Murrell," he answered. "I come here to larn from you an' first you ask me a question. Now I count so larned an' cunnin' a man as you be should know me an' my business afore I tell it."

"As to who you be," the old man replied, "that I know well enough. Mr. Peter Fossett, o' Gatpoles Farm, Kelvedon. A man o' money, if 'tis said true, an' Gatpoles Farm be five hundred acres. Am I right?"

"Ay, 'tis true enough."

"But 'tis no claim o' my art to know that," the old man went on. "You're the only stranger in the place, an' folks talk. Your man talks, an' arl Hadleigh knows as much as I've told 'ee by this. But as to your business with me, 'tis no such plain matter. D'ye wish me to tell it?"

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"Ay, Master Murr'll, I do."

"Then 'tis proper I work it by geomancy. 'Tis a curious art, an' known to few. I take a paper, thus, an' I write your name, so. There be twelve letters in that name, and I divide them into fower threes. I putt down they fower threes one above another, so. Now take you the pen an' make a row o' plain strokes opposite each three. Stop when you please, and don't count as you do't, or arl will spile."

Mr. Peter Fossett, willing to give his victim plenty of rope, took the paper and obeyed. With a blot and a smudge here and there, four heavily fisted rows of strokes presently appeared on the paper opposite the letters, and then Murrell took the paper and considered it with anxious care.

"You hev wrote these strokes in order opposite the letters in fower rows, without countin' any row," he said. "Good. Now I work this geomantic figure."

The old man's pen hovered a moment over the letters and strokes, and then descended to describe a group of ciphers at the end of each row. This done, he began another group of ciphers below the whole muddle, dotting his pen here and there among the letters, strokes, and ciphers above, and deriving his lower group, by some mysterious mathematic, from his upper.

"Right witness; left witness; judge," he said

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thoughtfully, carrying his pen from one cipher to another. "Here I read much that would surprise you. Your reason for coming here now; you ask me to tell you that?"

"Ay, I'd mighty like you to guess it!"

"Guess it I will not, for there's no need. By my cur'ous arts I can know for sarten. Master Fossett, you be most desperate in love!"

Mr. Fossett's first impulse was to guffaw aloud. Cunning Murrell's guess was the farthest thing from his mind, and one he had never dreamed of. But he held in his mirth by a choking effort, and dissembled, for he began to scheme vaguely at last. More rope, he thought, more rope for this amazing old fool to hang himself high as Haman.

"Master Murrell!" he exclaimed, "that be the most surprisin' 'zact guess that ever I hev heard! Wonnerful!"

"'Tis no guess, I tell 'ee, Master Fossett. 'Tis no guess, but sarten knowledge by my lawful arts."

"Then if it be no guess," answered Fossett, following his opportunity, "maybe you can just as easy tell me the lady's name?"

Cunning Murrell shook his head sadly. "You be mighty hard o' belief, Master Fossett," he said, "but if you want more proof, more you shall have, plensheous more. Can I tell 'ee the lady's name? For sarten truth I

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can an' will, an' that without another word."

He returned to his geomantic formula and studied it afresh. "You hev put your hand to this unknowin'," he said, "and all your thoughts lie bare to him who hev the art to read the figure. Her name—her name—let me see now; her given name be Ann!"

If Mr. Fossett had not been a stranger, he would have begun to feel uneasy. But, confident in ignorance, he chuckled inwardly, for the old man was adding blunder to blunder. The sole human creature called Ann whom Fossett could remember was his own grandmother. This should come out, that very night, in the Castle parlor to Murrell's face, if but he could be brought there among his neighbors. Meanwhile, let the old humbug be drawn farther into the net.

"Master Murrell, you surprise me more and more. 'Tis prophecy, nothin' else. Though 'tis true Ann be a name christened to more'n one. D'ye get her other name too?"

"Her other name," Murrell answered deliberately, dropping his eyes and his pen once more to the paper, "her other name—yes; her—her other name is p'inted out by the figure in letters of your own name—the first two an' the last two. Her other name I read is Pett—Pett with two t's—Ann Pett is the whole name!"

Fossett the stranger, apprehending nothing,

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gazed upward at the herbs depending from the ceiling, and whistled to keep his mouth from a grin. This was magnificent. Possibly there were people in the world of the name of Pett, but quite certainly he had never heard that name till this moment. The old simpleton was floundering worse at every step. What a show-up for him in the evening at the Castle! What an unadulterated lark! More rope for the self-strangulation of Cunning Murrell!

"Whew! That do beat arl!" cried Mr. Fossett. "Ann Pett, sarten to say! That there blessed name as hev been what's-a-naming itself on my heart like a thingumbob! 'Tis outrageous wonnerful! Master Murrell, you be the most scientific oad pusson in Essex; the hull world be knowed to ye like a book. An' what will ye do next, Master Murrell?"

"Next?" repeated Cunning Murrell, plainly gratified by his client's enthusiasm. "Next I do what most you wish. 'Tis plain you den't come here onny to be told what you know. You come here to ask my help, an' my help you shall hev. I will give 'ee your heart's wish; her stubborn heart shall be overcome, and Ann Pett shall be drawed toward 'ee, an' marry her you shall. 'Tis what you're longing, ben't it?"

"Ay, Master Murrell, what else?" the visitor assured him, shaking with interior mirth. "'Tis what I'm longin' most hainish powerful."

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"Good then. Here is more paper. Write on the one piece your own name and Ann Pett's on the other."

This feat Mr. Fossett accomplished, with a great squaring of elbows. Murrell took the two papers, and filled a glass with water. Then, twisting the papers together, he lighted them with a match and let the black ashes drop into the water till no paper was left.

"So it must stand for two hours, and then I shall deal further," observed Murrell, putting the glass on a shelf and covering it with a saucer. "Those words, that seem to be gone, shall be carried to the mind of Ann Pett by cur'ous an' subtile arts. An' more shall follow. Take you a paper more, and write as I shall tell. Write plain: *'Tis Ann Pett is my heart's love*. Have 'ee got that?"

"Ay, that's down," Fossett replied, winking genially at the paper.

"*'Tis Ann Pett is my heart's love. 'Tis my wish she be my wife, and thereto I give pledge*. Is't arl down?"

"*Give pledge*," repeated Fossett, with his tongue curled at the side of his mouth as he looped the "g." "Ay, 'tis there."

"Now sign."

"Sign?"

"Yes, full name. 'Tis naught without your own written name."

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"There 't be, then. But don't you burn that too?"

"Not till the right time. T'other must stand two hours, as I told 'ee, an' I do nothen' with this till then. How far or how near Ann Pett be at this moment I don't know, though to find that would be easy enough for me. But far or near, north, south, east or west, these words will go to her by ways you don't dream of an' draw her an' draw her, Master Fossett. 'Tis enough. I hev other work."

There was a timid rap of knuckles on the front door. Mr. Fossett rose reluctantly, for there was no moderation in his triumph, and he wished to draw Murrell still more.

"Ben't there nothin' else you'll tell me, Master Murrell?" he asked. "I fare that monsus bad in love, that 'twould be a mussy to tell me anythin'."

"Ay, I make no doubt. But wait—till to-night, at any rate."

"To-night, Master Murrell? D'ye think she can be drawn to me as soon as that?"

"I make no promise, Master Fossett, but 'tis arl a possibility."

"Master Murrell, will 'ee come to me to-night at the Castle parlor? Come to me there, an' I'll pay 'ee handsome."

"'Tis no habit o' mine, the Castle parlor,"

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the old man replied; "but come I will, since you ask. At eight o'clock."

"Thankee, Master Murrell, thankee. An' if you can show then, fair and clear, you've done all ye say, if you'll draw her to me, I'll pay a fi'-pun' note and glad! I'll hev it ready!"

Mr. Fossett passed the little girl who had come for ointment, and turned into the quiet Castle Lane to explode. Truly this was a most magnificent go! He could scarcely have imagined anybody so utterly giving himself into the hands of the enemy as this misnamed Cunning Murrell had done. That evening in the Castle parlor there should be fun. Hadleigh should witness the confounding of Murrell by the revelation that there was no Ann Pett in existence, and that consequently the triumphant Fossett could not have fallen in love with her, even if that weakness had been at all in his way, which it wasn't. Therewith and therefore that Murrell was but a feeble humbug, captive to the bow and spear of that same unconquerable Fossett.

He did his business that day with interruptions of ecstatic chuckling. He spread hints abroad that the total extinction of Murrell was appointed for eight that evening in the parlor of the Castle; and he was there, with an uncommonly full company, long before the hour. To all inquiries he opposed a wink, a grin, and a

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shake of the head. Not a word would he say to spoil the show; he would merely promise—and that he did a hundred times—that the fun should be well worth the waiting.

The cunning man was punctual. The hour was at its seventh stroke when he appeared, small, sharp, shiny-hatted and calm. "Good-evenin', neighbors," he piped in his thin voice. "Good to ye arl. I den't expect to find so many here."

"Ah, 'tis business o' mine, but never mind that," said the eager Fossett, with a wink at the expectant company. "This most as-tonishin' scientific neighbor o' yourn, genelman, hev done sich as-tonishin' things to-day, that I'll hev no secrets from ye arl, so surprisin' it be. I went to see Master Murrell this mornin', genelman, an' he knowed what I came for afore I told him! He told me, slap out, that I was most desperate in love! In love! Me!"

Mr. Fossett looked about him and grinned, with a second wink.

"He told me I was in love," he proceeded, "an' he made count to tell me the gal's name. He did a little game of naughts and crosses, an' he counted it out o' that. He counted out the name, genelman, and he told me it. It were Ann Pett! Genelman! you'll be mighty interested to know I'm most desperate in love with Ann Pett!"

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"Ann Pett!" gasped Prentice and Jobson together. And others on every side repeated "Ann Pett!" staring like crabs. Dan Fisk set up a fit of laughter that lasted, with intervals, for the rest of the evening.

"Ah, Ann Pett! Ye well may laugh! An' here's a fi'-pun' note I'm to pay if he draws her an' draws her so artful an' cunning to me this very evenin'! This Ann Pett what I love so true, genelmen!"

Prentice and Jobson began laughing now, and Dan Fisk took a corner of the note and pushed it toward Murrell. "Go on," he cried, in a gasp, "he'll do it—he'll do it!"

There was something in the faces about him that Mr. Fossett had not expected. He checked his grin and stared about him. With that Cunning Murrell spoke.

"'Tis true enough, neighbors," he said, with simple composure. "This very suitable an' well-to-do young man hev come to me an' confessed himself most hopeless in love with Ann Pett. He hev further give me a document, signed all regular, pledgin' to marry her; the kind of document there's no answering to in a promise-breach case, such as might occur with other couples, where the young man ain't smitten so deadly deep as Master Fossett be."

Fossett, slow of apprehension, but stricken

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with a vague fear, gasped: "What? That paper? Den't you burn it?"

"Burn it? Why no, sarten to say. 'Twould be poor respect to such a document as that, an' foolish, to burn it. Well, neighbors, as I were sayin', considerin' arl things, an' seein' how desperate this young man implored me to draw Ann Pett to him——"

"Ann Pett!" burst out Fossett. "There ben't no Ann Pett!"

"That's an unreasonable remark for a man so fond of her by witness of his own hand-writin'," the old man went on gently. "Well, neighbors, to make short, I *hev* drawed her to him. Mr. Fossett be a very good match for a darter o' mine, as things go, especially a widder darter, with few chances at her age. You'll find I've earned your fi'-pun' note, Mr. Fossett. Ann! Ann Pett!"

Murrell opened the door and called into the outer passage. And at his call came Ann Pett, wizen as her father, thin and sharp and worn, with her wisp of mouse-grey hair straggling from under a shawl. She stood in the doorway and stared, at first all vacant incomprehension, and then with some irritation at the storm of guffaws that raged unaccountably before her.

Mr. Peter Fossett gurgled, gulped, blinked and shrank. He looked wildly about him, but in the only door stood Ann Pett, now beginning

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to bridle and snarl at the mirth she could not comprehend. Then with a despairing snatch at his wits Mr. Fossett caught Murrell by the arm and gasped in his ear: "Hev she seen that paper?"

Murrell, unruffled, regarded his victim.

"That I don't answer," he said. "But what if she hev not?"

"I'm done—I'll buy it. Come outside."

Next week Cuning Murrell was observed in a new blue coat, with brass buttons.

WICKS'S WATERLOO

I FIND that in the mental perspective of most people, the days of the Kent and Essex smugglers lie very far back, while in my own they stand surprisingly near. It is habit of mind, and nothing more. Those days were gone before mine began; though not only have I seen and talked with grey old smugglers on the Essex coast, but I have even tasted the white brandy of such astonishing strength, which they brought over in the light "tubs" of three or four gallons' capacity. I tasted it on my twenty-first birthday, forty years and more after it had been smuggled; and it came from an unsuspected secret store of Roboshobery Dove's, who thus designed to honor my majority. The treat was accompanied with much sage advice on my entry on manhood, as was proper from this old man of ninety and rather more, who had fought the French afloat as a boy; but a lecture twice as long, from one in no such way endeared to me as was he, could not have marred the memory of that amazing drink, so mild and mellow and soft, albeit a dilution of four times as much water was needed to tame its strength. If one is asked for dates by haters of foggy arithmetic, then it is enough to say that

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the last isolated attempt to run a cargo of brandy on the Essex coast failed in the year 1854; and that the trade was falling out of use a decade earlier.

So it happened that my majority was celebrated from what was probably the very last tub of "run" spirits remaining in Essex—perhaps in all England; and the tale which never failed to season Roboshobery's moral discourse was on this occasion the tale of the run—one of the last successful ventures—which brought over this very tub and about four score more.

"If I'd ha' been a man o' money, sir," the old man said, "I might ha' given you a birthday compliment of greater cost; but I count it might ha' been easier forgotten. An' if you want still more to remember it by, why, I'll tell 'ee this: the bringing over o' that very brandy was the cause of the very first teetotal meetin' in Essex. Nothin' to be proud of p'r'aps, but a curiosity; 'an 'tis my belief that if such stuff as this could ha' come over with no hindrance all along, there'd never ha' been a teetotal meetin' in Essex to this very day."

Here I solemnly apologize for my old friend. His was an earlier age, before many of our modern morals had been invented, and before we had discovered how much more respectable we are than our fathers. At the same time, with the taste and scent of that ineffable white brandy

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present to my senses, I was mightily disposed to agree with his conjecture.

"It was after the new coastguard was formed as that came over," the old man went on, "and it was mostly the new coastguard as helped to kill smuggling. It went on pretty well though, hereabout, for some years; we'd got a sleepy oad chief officer, a good deal too fat for his business, and Leigh windows were cleaned with Dutch gin right up to forty years ago. But just about this time there came a mighty smart an' knowin' chief-boatman this way, promoted from somewhere right off—Poole, I think they said. His name were Wicks—Archibald Wicks, to be complete—and he were so very mighty smart as to be very near as smart as he thought hisself, and that were saying a deal. He hadn't done with promotion either, had Master Archie Wicks, chief-boatman as he were. You see it were a time of changes in the sarvice, an' 'twas thought promotions might be made higher still for some men; they might be chief-officers, 'twas rumored, or anything; an' if such promotions were to come to pass Master Archie made up his mind to have one o' the first. If the chief-officer liked to go to sleep an' wait for his pension, Master Archie Wicks was the last to object; but he kept himself mighty jumpy up an' down the station, an' he tried a number of new dodges that sad upset a lot o' people hereabout, an' sent a good

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few tubs of *this* sort the wrong way. For one thing, he had a most astonishin' takin' way with the women. He was smart out an' in, an' he'd go any lengths to pump information.

"Now at the time I'm talking of the last freighter about here who did anything large in this way was oad Tom Blyth. You've heard tell of 'Hard-apple' Blyth, of Paglesham?"

The legends of that famous smuggler, far back at the turn of the century, were familiar tales of my childhood. I had heard enough told of "Hard-apple" Blyth to fill a book.

"Well, oad Tom Blyth were his nephew; so you see he come of pretty tough stock. Oad Tom were the last o' the big freighters here-about, and this here brandy came in one of his last freights. There aren't no more o' the Blyths left now, except a darter, as were a young gal at the time.

"Now one of Master Wicks's new dodges was to watch for the carriers, 'stead o' the boats. You know what that 'ud mean, o' course. He'd let the watch off-shore go easy, an' he'd keep his eye on one or two o' the men as was certain to be took on to carry the tubs inland as soon as they were landed. Like as not one of 'em was an' informer. The dodge wasn't of great advantage except it were unexpected, you see. When you got your cargo ashore, fair an' easy, an' everything seemed going right, you got a bit less

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careful. An' so long as the preventive men kep' the carriers in sight, wherever they might be, the tubs must come to 'em, sooner or later. But then information's a thing as can travel both ways, as you may ha' noticed. I've told you the story o' the two Drakes, Eli an' Robin, an' the Black Badger, and you'll remember that one o' them brothers was a preventive man an' the other a smuggler, an' the arrangement worked very well for both of 'em. That was twenty years before the time I'm talkin' of now, an' George Fourth were King; but there was still a bit o' the same sort o' thing goin'; an' if there wasn't brothers on the two sides there was one or two o' the coastguard as were pretty good friends with the smugglers. So, as I was sayin', information bein' a thing as can travel both ways, oad Tom Blyth an' the rest of 'em wasn't far behind Master Archie Wicks moves, however he made 'em.

"Now when this little cargo was comin' in, Wicks was all on the look-out for the tub-carriers, but oad Tom was up sides with him from the beginnin'. The word was passed for carriers to meet at Pest'us corner after dark, an' there they did. An' there, sure enough was Mr. Archie Wicks, an' one or two of his men, lyin' low an' watchin', ready to follow wherever the carriers might go. Sure enough they did follow, an' the carriers, marchin' fair an' open

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along the main road, led 'em all the way to Prittywell, to the Spread Eagle, an' there they went in, the whole gang of 'em, an' into the clubroom. So Master Wicks, feelin' smarter every minute, sends off a man as hard as he could go to rouse up the chief-officer and bring in the patrols from all along Leigh an' Bemfleet. An' there he sat in hidin' an' waited, for he guessed the run would be tried near by, an' the carriers was just lyin' up in the Spread Eagle, till they was signalled for. An' while Mr. Wicks waited up by the Spread Eagle, the chief-officer and all the patrols waited down on Sou'church beach, to be handy as soon as the carriers made a move.

"An' that was all that happened. 'All that happened. For the carriers they just sat down an' had a sing-song, an' called for what they pleased!"

"And then went home?"

"Ay, they scattered all out an' went home when the house closed at last. You can't follow forty men goin' forty different ways home to forty different places! An' not much good if you could. Golden Adams, that had charge o' the gang, and was chairman o' the sing-song, he come out first, an' called on Mr. Archie Wicks for a song—out in the road, at the top of his voice. So Mr. Wicks, a-lyin' there hidin' behind the ledge, tumbled to the swindle and

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sneaked off quiet enough, to make the best tale he could to the chief-officer. He guessed then, did Mr. Wicks, an' guessed right, that the carriers hadn't been wanted that night to carry off tubs at all, but just to carry off him an' the rest o' the coastguard to a place where they couldn't do no harm, while the cargo came ashore safe an' easy somewhere else. So the fust round of the fight was all agin Mr. Archie Wicks. The carriers, they spent a jolly evening, and Tom Blyth an' his boat's crew, they got their cargo in quiet and secret, and everybody was pleased except Mr. Archie Wicks an' the chief-officer, who hadn't been kep' out o' bed so late for years.

"But Mr. Wicks wasn't done for yet. Not he. He knowed well enough the cargo had been landed safe, an' put somewhere. Consequence it were his business to find it. It were plain it couldn't ha' gone far, the carriers not havin' touched it, an' so he starts out to look for it in the neighborhood.

"I told you oad Tom Blyth had a darter. Nell were her name, an' a very takin' sort o' gal she were to look at at that time. Different young chaps went a-courtin' to Nell Blyth at different times, but just then 'twere Joe Furber—a bit of a smuggler hisself, though a boat-builder in the main. Mr. Archie Wicks, so smart and knowin' among the gals as he were,

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was allus ready to pass the time o' day to Nell Blyth; and so, the next mornin' after the sing-song at Prittywell, up goes Mr. Wicks, all so brave and gay in the Queen's uniform, to oad Tom Blyth's to fascinate his darter Nell. He'd took care to see oad Tom safe down at the Smack Inn first; and up went he, sure o' findin' Nell alone.

"Nell weren't exactly alone, for Joe Furber were there, talking with Nell over the fence. But Mr. Archie Wicks were that clever an' free with his chaff he soon had poor young Joe dunted an' marthered altogether, an' sneakin' off alone, sulky an' beat out. An' then he turned on his most gallivashious gammick to young Nell, an' presently they were whisperin' an' laughin' together that thick you'd never guess there were such a party as poor young Joe Furber alive.

" 'Ah, well,' says Wicks, arter a bit, 'I'm off duty now an' when I'm off duty I can shut my eyes as well as another. Eh? You know!' An' he winks most engagin'. 'I can shut my eyes to *some* things when I ain't on duty, my dear, though not to a pretty face like yourn. Why, I was up at—well, never mind where, though I near let it out—I was up at a place the other day where they mixed me as stiff a noggin o' moonshine—ay, straight out o' the tub, too—as ever I hope to taste. Prime stuff

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it were; but bein' all in the way o' friendship, d'ye think I den't shut one eye? Eh? Ay, an' both on 'em! But I opened my mouth—an' mighty glad to open it again for liquor half as good, too! If there was anybody to try me.'

"'An' *could* you take a drop now?' says Nell, pleased as Punch with her new beau. 'Could you? S'pose a friend were to offer it, quiet?'

"'Could I?' says Archie Wicks, pleased as she was, though for another reason. 'Could I?' says he. 'Just you try me, my dear! Lord bless ye, I know well enough your dear old dad can give a friend a drop o' the proper stuff, or you for him! An' if I can't shut my eyes with such a nice gal as you about—well, I count I know which way to turn 'em, as a friend!'

"'Well, young Nell Blyth, bright an' gigglin', she took him into the keepin' room, an' she pulls out a big chest from the wall, an' slides the wainscot behind it. An' sure enough Mr. Archie Wicks *did* know which way to turn his eyes, an' there to see, behind the wainscot, rows an' rows o' new tubs—all packed snug as cockles behind the wall an' under the floor! This was what he'd come for, an' so mighty delighted was he to see it that it was hard work to stop an' take his drink. He did stop an' take it though. Nell Blyth pulled a plug from the nearest tub an' squibbed out a dram of—well, of that stuff

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you've been tryin' yourself, but forty year younger. An' Archie Wicks, when he'd a-wattered it, he drinks most galliant to the prettiest gal in Essex, otherwise called Nell Blyth, an' carried it all off first rate, notwithstandin' he was longin' to run an' make the seizure. He did more than that, too. It struck him he'd like to take prisoners as well as goods, an' philanderin' about to know when he were to see Nell next, she let slip that her father was expectin' some friends after dark that same evenin' an' that she would be goin' out.

"'Ah!' says Wicks, more satisfied with himself than he'd ever been before in his life, 'then we must put it off, my dear. I shall be on duty to-night!' An' that was about all the truth he'd spoken since breakfast.

"He pretty well guessed what the evenin' meetin' meant, with the gal sent out o' the way, an' he made up his mind to wait an' have men and tubs together. An' so he did.

"He promised the chief-officer a real catch this night, an' they fetched patrols an' boatmen in, very quiet, from all ways alongshore. They crep' up the hill by different ways an' lay down snug all round the house, waitin'. An' then Mr. Archie Wicks, bein' the smart man o' the gang, he crarled round by the yard to where he could peep in at the keepin'-room winder, where the light were.

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“ ’Twere all in good train, as he could see. There were oad Tom Blyth sittin’ there with Martin Cox—a man Mr. Wicks wanted near as much as oad Tom hisself. They was a-sittin’ by the table, with glasses, grinnin’ an’ chucklin’ and talkin’, and there were a tub, shameless an’ open, on the table before ’em, with a turnpipe an’ spigot in it. As he were peepin’ there came somebody along the lane, an’ presently up got oad Tom an’ let in Jeff Cater by the front door.

“Jeff sat down, an’ oad Tom gets another glass for him an’ fills it at the tub, with his back to Jeff as he did it. Wicks guessed he were after givin’ him the drink neat, to make him cough, an’ so ’twould seem. The stuff was about a hundred over proof, so you may guess what it ’ud be like without *any* water. Jeff took a gulp, innocent enough, an then began to cough an’ spit into the fire, while the others sat an’ laughed at him.

“Then oad Tom let in Sim Bartrip, an’ they played the same game on him. Sim nearly coughed hisself black in the face, though if you’d ha’ knowed Sim an’ his habits you’d ha’ backed him to swallow it bilin’.

“Then in comes Rob Sturt, an’ they put the joke on him. Well, to make it short, half a dozen o’ Tom’s friends came in, countin’ all, an’ each one was made to cough most outrageous,

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while all the others as had been had in their turns sat an' enjoyed the fun.

"Mr. Archie Wicks counted he'd seen enough, so he crep' back to the chief-officer an' reported. They waited a bit longer, but no more o' Tom Blyth's friends showed up, an' 'twere gettin' late. So the chief-officer wouldn't wait no longer thinkin' seven smugglers an' 'a full cargo o' tubs prize enough. So he brings up his men close round the house, an' he an' Wicks goes and bangs hard at at the front door.

"Oad Tom comes to the door with a candle. 'Good-evenin',' says oad Tom.

"'Good-evenin','" says Wicks, shovin' his back agin the door while the chief-officer stepped in. 'We've just come on a little perfessional wisit, Mr. Blyth, an' it won't be any good you jumpin' through the winders or what not, 'cos the house is surrounded.'

"'All right,' says oad Tom, 'what should I want to jump through winders for?'

"'What for?' says Wicks, shovin' oad Tom before him into the keepin'-room. 'What for? Why, what d'ye call this here little party?' The tub was gone from the table, but that was what he expected. 'What d'ye call this here little party?' says Wicks.

"'This here's a teetotal meetin',' says oad Tom.

"'Ah! so I should ha' guessed,' says Wicks.

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'Here, Wilkins!' he sings out, 'you an' two more o' you come an' pull out this chest.'

" 'What d'ye want to come a-movin' my furnitute about for?' says oad Tom Blyth, makin' to putt a bold face on it. 'There ain't nothen' o' yourn there! No, nor nothin' agin the law, nayther!'

" 'Lucky for you if there ain't,' says Wicks. An' with that he pulls back the wainscot, an' there lay the tubs all in rows, snug as peas in a pod, just as he'd seen in the mornin'.

" 'All right,' says oad Tom, seein' there was no more to be said. 'All right,' says he, 'I'll go quiet. But you don't want my friends.'

" 'Ha, ha! But we can't spare 'em yet!' says Wicks; for there wasn't a man of 'em that Wicks hadn't had his eye on for months. 'We'll adjourn this here teetotal meeting solid as it stands. Come along! One at a time, please—whistle the rest in, Wilkins!'

"An' so there went down the hill such a procession as ain't been seen since. There was the seven prisoners an' the tubs, an' all Leigh out in their night-rig to see the show. Master Archie Wicks was prancin' on the wind, like a promoted peacock in full flight, an' he pitched off the gammick of the teetotal meetin' left and right. In them days teetotal meetin's were things you only read about in the papers, up in Lancashire an' thereaway, an' the joke of

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a teetotal meetin' of oad smugglers here in Essex, sittin' round a cargo o' tubs, went through Leigh like fireworks.

"When they was all safe in the Custom-'us at last, oad Tom Blyth ups and says: 'Well now, Mr. Wicks, you an' your men had better set about broachin' your 'lowance tub, for however it goes I admit you've earned it!'

"In them days you see, when there was a seizure, one tub went to the men as a sort o' perquisite. I doubt it wouldn't be allowed now, but then 'twere quite the reg'lar thing. So Mr. Wicks, ready enough, rememberin' his mornin' dram, sticks a gimlet into the first tub that comes, and fills pannikins right an' left. But he never emptied that tub. Afore he'd gone down a dozen pannikins there was some of his men a-coughin' an' a-spittin as fast as any o' the smugglers up at Blyth's. 'Why, choke me blind!' roars the one as got his tongue first; 'it's WATER!'

"An' that was just what it was—water, every tub of it! They had been full o' white brandy once, but there were plugged-up gimlet holes in every tub, an' nothin' but water inside 'em!

" 'Why,' said oad Tom Blyth, lookin' surprised, 'o' course, it's water. What did I tell ye? Den't I say it was a teetotal meetin'?' "

" 'Course he did' sings out the other smugglers. 'An' you've been a-callin' it a teetotal

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meetin' yourself, at the top of your voice, all through Leigh town! What did ye expect to find if 'tweren't water, eh?"

"'I dunno why me an' my friends hev been brought down here in this ill-convenient way,' says oad Tom very solemn, 'but I do know as I insist on these here tubs o' water bein' carried back to where they kim from!'

"Well, well; I've seen a number o' fanteegs round these parts in my time, but in all ninety year I never heard such a dovercourt as there were over that teetotal meetin'. Wicks was glad to get a shove on to another station. Of course, you may guess the time hadn't been wasted while that teetotal meetin' was on, an' while all the preventive men for miles round were attendin' to it. The carriers had taken their evenin' off the night before, but this night it was their turn to work. Golden Adams captained 'em again, an' they whipped off the real tubs from wherever they were hid while the teetotal meetin' were in full blast. Two nights runnin' oad Tom Blyth had got all the coastguards in a crowd together just where it suited him best, an' finished up by makin' 'em the joke of half Essex."

"It seems to me," I said, "that something depended on Nell Blyth, too."

"Nell Blyth," said Roboshobery, "were an obedient gal, an' more to it, she did what she

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were told with a proper gumption. You know her."

"I?"

"Yes, I count you do. She went past this here winder while I was talkin'."

"What, old Mrs. Furber?"

"What you'd call old, sir, no doubt, though she might be my darter. Joe Furber died ten year back."

THE DRINKWATER ROMANCE

I

MR. REGINALD DRINKWATER had rooms in the Temple. That was almost all of importance that could be said about Mr. Reginald Drinkwater, whose life had been wholly uneventful for the twenty-four years of it that had passed before he encountered this, his first adventure of a romantic complexion.

Mr. Drinkwater had not been called to the bar—he had not even begun to read with that purpose; but he was here, at the Temple, quite convenient if ever he should definitely decide to take that step. In fact, he had literary leanings, and had long reasoned with himself that, if he should actually embrace the profession of letters, any time spent in preparing for the law would be wasted, and waste of time was a vice against which a literary man should guard himself with especial care.

He had not actually produced any literary work, for that, as everybody knows, is not a

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thing to be rushed at. But he had taken the chambers once occupied by a novelist of great reputation, and had laid in a large stock of manuscript paper of the sort said to be used by Mr. Thomas Hardy, and a fountain pen having a testimonial from Mr. Hall Caine; so that there remained no obstacle to success, in case his final decision should set him in the direction of his inclinations. Meantime, he received from his mother in Bedfordshire a regular allowance which was quite sufficient for his quiet requirements, and he wisely reflected that so long as one refrained from committing oneself irrevocably to one or other profession one avoided the possibility of an error which might cause serious regret throughout the rest of one's career.

Mr. Drinkwater's rooms had the advantage of a situation from which one looked into the windows, a few yards away, of the chambers of the great Buss, K.C. The two sets of rooms, in fact, adjoined at the back of next-door houses set at an angle, so that Reginald Drinkwater, were it not for the general decorum of his behavior and his particular reverence for his distinguished neighbor, might have peashot Buss, K.C., at short range, when the windows were a little open. Also, if Buss, K.C., had not been a very fat, stumpy little man, with very short arms, and if he and Reginald Drinkwater had been ac-

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quainted, they might have shaken hands across the sills of the two windows closest to the angle over the little yard below. This, indeed, was a neighborly courtesy of which Reginald had dreamed as a possibility in his future times of eminence. Meanwhile, what with the proximity of Buss, K.C., and the literary associations of his own rooms, he felt himself rather eminent than otherwise, already.

"Ah, yes," he would say on the infrequent occasion of a friend's visit; "they are old Buss's rooms. Fine collection of old silver he's got there, too." Which looked almost as though Reginald were a familiar visitor of Buss, K.C.; though, in fact, he only knew of the fine old silver, as others did, by report, and from the newspaper accounts of auction sales at which the great Buss was a buyer.

When Mr. Reginald Drinkwater's inactivity had so endured for a good while he conceived a grievance against his very comfortable circumstances, in that his life had been wholly empty of adventure. This, he told himself, was the reason that he had not as yet launched on a brilliant literary career; for he had heard on high authority that one could only write in the light of one's own actual experience. So he took to seeking adventure in the streets of London, where, he believed, from the teaching of many magazine stories, it was very readily encountered. But his

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luck was out, for after many attempts he was rewarded with nothing better than the purchase of a dummy pawn-ticket from a plausible young man in Fetter Lane. It is possible that a naturally retiring disposition hindered Reginald's ambitions, since, after all, London is a strange and adventurous place enough, as he was at length convinced. For indeed his romance came at last.

He had left his rooms one February afternoon, with the simple design of buying tobacco at a shop in Fleet Street; and because it was to be so short an expedition he had merely locked his inner door and left his "oak" swung open. The "oak" and the inner door, it may be explained parenthetically, stood, as is usual, scarce two feet apart, and the former, a ponderous iron-strapped fabric, was only locked when the inmate was away from home, or, being in, desired no visitors.

Reginald Drinkwater bought the tobacco he required, and strolled easily back up Fleet Street with his purchase in his pocket and his ignoble condition in his mind. Here he walked, in the midst of six million romances—for he had read, and therefore believed, that every life held its own—and not only had he found no romance himself, but he could guess at none of those about him. So Reginald walked, puzzled and ill-content, unaware that his romance waited for

him a hundred strides away, and was nearer with every step.

He turned in at the Temple Gate and twisted left and right through the passages leading to his quarters, musing gloomily; and so he ascended the stairs, and reached his landing to perceive that his "oak" was standing much closer than he had left it. He swung it back, and stood amazed. For here was his romance.

Crouching between the "oak" and the inner door, shrinking into the angle farthest from him, her lips parted and her eyes full of fear, was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen or ever wished to see.

Her heavy veil was flung back from her now pale face, her eyes were black and large and appealing, and her skin, brilliantly clear, had the tone of ivory.

"You will not hurt me?" she pleaded. "You are not an enemy?"

Reginald, confounded by the vision before him, and too anxious to remove such an impression to be wholly coherent, stammered fervent denials. Except for the lady's own obvious terror he would have been a little frightened himself, for he was young and susceptible, and prone to nervousness in female society.

"I am much afraid," she said. "I am pursued. You are not angry that I should hide in your doorway?"

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He protested, still with some confusion, that nothing was so far from his thoughts; and was adding that, on the contrary, he was ready and anxious to do anything on earth to save her, when she checked him with raised forefinger, and a head turned to listen.

"Was not that a step?" she said. "Is there nobody else on the stairs?"

They listened together, but there was no sound.

"They are waiting, then," she said, "and watching to me—watching *for* me at the outside. Can I not go by another door?"

There was no other door, he explained, and indeed there was no need for such an exit. If she would place herself under his protection he would be happy to see her safely——

"No, no!" she interrupted; "you do not understand how bad it is. I should be followed—they would kill me somewhere else—and my brother, my dear brother! I must wait a little while. I think they do not know it is in this house I have come. You will be kind, sir, will you not? I have not one friend; and if you will let me stay in your room a little while, till it comes dark, I can escape, I think. You are very kind—will you let me stay a little while?"

It might seem an odd request in ordinary; but the circumstances were far from ordinary now. To Reginald, who had met his adventure

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at last, they were stunning, bewildering. Could he possibly drive away a friendless girl—to meet the strange perils she feared, alone? Was he not rather conscious of a secret joy that the danger, whatever it was had driven her to his protecting arm? He turned the key in the inner door, and thrust it open.

“Oh, you are very kind, sir—so very kind,” the stranger repeated as she entered; and it was only now that Reginald noticed that she said “vehry” and that her whole accent and manner were a little foreign. “You have saved me,” she continued, still much agitated; “and my brother—especially you have saved my dear brother!”

“Your brother?” repeated Reginald, with a doubtful look about the staircase as he closed the door. “Your brother?”

“Yes—my dear brother. He is not here—he is hiding. That is why I am so afraid to be followed, for then they will find him. Oh, the wicked men! They are so very cruel!”

The beautiful girl sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. Reginald, his whole soul filled with indignation that the world could hold creatures so base as to put her to such distress, was tortured with helplessness. If only he could do something—if only the unknown enemy stood tangibly before him.

Presently she looked up and spoke again. “Pardon me,” she said; “I am very weak when I

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should be very strong. You are a kind friend, but I should not trouble you with these things. Perhaps I can go away. Can they see these windows from the street?"

Reginald hastened to reassure her. The windows overlooked nothing but a private yard, to which there was no access from any public place.

"You are really quite safe," he protested. "And if there is anything I can do—anything in the world—if I am not intruding on private affairs, and you will tell me——"

But her attention was fixed on the windows. "Perhaps," she said, "I could go that way, if the other houses have doors in other streets. There is no other door here, you say, but the windows would not be so difficult—to go out by that house."

She nodded toward Mr. Buss's rooms. But, as Reginald explained, Mr. Buss was away, taking a fortnight on the Riviera, and the door of his chambers would be locked. At the same time it gave him a further sense of the desperate situation of this delicate girl, that she should for a moment contemplate an escape by the expedient of scrambling from one window to another across an angle of wall thirty feet above the yard. He strove again to reassure her.

"That way is not possible," he said; "but you are really quite safe. Perhaps you have

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come from a country where the police are not—”

She looked up quickly.

“From another country?” she said. “You know I am not English? And they say my English is so good! How quick and clever you are!”

Never had flattery sounded so sweet in Reginald’s ears. Indeed flattery was a thing to them singularly unfamiliar, so small was his acquaintance with the world.

“Your English,” he replied, “is splendid—beautiful! But I thought—I supposed—something suggested that you were a foreigner, and I wish to tell you that our London police——”

“Yes, I know—they are excellent,” she interrupted. “Better, I hope, at least than those of my poor country, where they have allowed a terrible crime—a horrible crime—that has made the whole world shudder!”

Reginald thought instantly of Portugal and the murder of the king and his son; for the newspapers had been clamorous with the crime for a week past. “Do you speak Portugal?” he asked tentatively.

“Ah, indeed!” she replied with a melancholy smile. “My poor country! It is wonderful that you should judge so well; it is good for me that you are my friend, and not my enemy! Do you guess also what is my trouble? Shall I tell you?”

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There was nothing in the world that could interest Reginald Drinkwater half so much, and he said so, in something very near those terms. "Unless," he added, "you would rather—rather not tell me."

"If it does not trouble you—'bore' you, is it not?—I would much like to tell you," she said. "It is so good to trust to a good friend; and when you have been so kind to shelter me from my enemies it is only right that I should tell you why I have asked your help. There has been great trouble in my country, and my dear brother Luiz and I have escaped to England. You have heard of the trouble?"

"Oh, yes—of course. The late dictator also has left Portugal, I believe. You are not related to him?"

"To him? To the oppressor? To the man who has caused everything? Never—that is not one of our misfortunes, I thank heaven. My dear brother was of the opposite party—the republicans."

"I see; and was implicated, I suppose, in the—the——"

"Do you mean in the horrible crime—the assassination of the poor king and the prince? Ah, never! You could never suppose it if you knew my brother Luiz—never! We are of good family, and my brother could have no part in such doings. That is why we are here, and in

such trouble. There were bad men in the republican party as well as good; indeed the bad men gained a great ascendancy, and it is by them that the king was assassinated. My brother opposed them in the party and they became his enemies. Because of that they nominated him to join with the others in the crime; he was to prove his constancy, they said. But instead he gave a warning, so that the assassins were obliged to change their plans. Have you read of it in the journals? You will see that they killed the poor king and the prince in the street, near the public offices. At first it was to be on the quay, when they landed; but of that my brother gave secret warning, and on the quay they were very carefully guarded. Why did they not guard them as carefully for the rest of the journey? I cannot say; but the thing happened, as now you know, and my brother and I fled to England to escape the vengeance of the republican committee, who knew of the warning he had sent, and who were angry that the queen and the other prince had not been killed too. You may read the journals, but you do not know what terrible things are going on in Lisbon, even now!"

"But surely you are safe here!"

"On the contrary, our enemies followed us by a ship that left the day after our own. We have changed our lodgings twice, but to-day I

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have been followed by two men—men that I have seen in Lisbon. I was terrified, and could not guess what to do. I came into the gardens here from the street, and walked about in the narrow courtyards, but they still followed. I think I must have escaped them for a moment when I turned into this court; but I found that there was no way out, so I ran up these stairs; and when I heard you coming, I feared they must have seen me enter and were still pursuing me. I did not suppose it would be a friend—such a kind friend; if you will not be angry that I call you my friend?”

To this, Reginald Drinkwater, flushing with delight and stammering with confusion, made a wild and random answer. “It is delightful to hear you say it,” he said, continuing, “and I wish I could do more—much more—anything—to make you say it again. Surely I can help you in some other way—some more important way?”

She smiled sadly and shook her head.

“That is very noble of you,” she said; “but I think there is nothing—nothing at least that might not be dangerous, which I should have no right to ask of you.”

“But tell me what it is,” protested Reginald vehemently, “and I will do it. Surely my knowledge of this country may be of use to strangers like you and your brother?”

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"I have been in England before," she said; "though, of course, you must understand your own country better than I. And perhaps—when I have told my brother of your kindness—perhaps he may know of some way in which you might help us, if you will let me remind you of your offer."

"If you will only promise that, whatever it is you ask me, you will make me happy," declaimed Reginald, with enthusiasm. "Will you promise it?"

"Señor," she began, looking up at his face—"but you have not yet told me your name."

Reginald repeated it, with an odd feeling that it had become a duller and less imposing name since he had last seen it, painted on his oak, only a few minutes ago.

"Mr. Reginald Drinkwater," she said—and at once the name became beautiful on her lips—"I will promise." She extended her hand. "I am *Lucia da Silva*."

The light in the courtyard was grown dull and dusk in the short February afternoon. "Perhaps it will be safe to go now," she said, rising and bending to peer once more from the window. "If," she added, "if you will do one little thing for me. Will you go first and see if they are watching? There are two men, one rather tall, though not very, and one small and short; both dark men. They must not see me go."

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Reginald repeated that he was ready to do anything, but suggested, in the meantime, tea from his gas-stove. His visitor, however, begged, with a very pretty anxiety, to be excused. She must lose no more time, she said, for already her brother would be alarmed at her long absence. And so Reginald left her and descended the staircase to scout from the front door.

As he went he was aware of somebody hurrying down before him on the lower flights; and when he emerged from the door he saw a man walking sharply away near the corner of the court. The man was alone, however, and though certainly not short, nor small, but stoutly built, was scarcely of a stature that anybody would call tall, being of about middle height. Reginald followed to the corner, and there watched while the stranger disappeared round the next, and his footsteps died away toward Middle Temple Lane. This would seem to have been merely a visitor leaving some of the lower rooms, and whoever he was, he was gone; so Reginald returned, looking out sharply as he walked. Nowhere was there a pair of lurking men—nowhere, indeed, a pair of men at all. A clerk or two hurrying home early, a tradesman's boy with a basket and a tuneless whistle, an old messenger with his badge, and nobody else; nobody hiding in doorways, nobody lounging. Clearly the chase must have been abandoned.

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So he returned with his report, and found the beautiful fugitive awaiting him in the doorway. Could she go? Was the way quite clear?

Reginald Drinkwater took coat, gloves and stick, and the two went out together. From her description it seemed clear that she had entered the Temple by the Middle Temple Lane gate; so now Reginald made it a point of strategy to leave by way of Whitefriars, where he knew a cab could be found in a quiet street.

The cab was found, and then Reginald met a certain disappointment. For Lucia would not permit him to accompany her for even part of the way.

"You are most kind, but it is better—much better—that I go alone," was all she would say; but there was that in her manner which made it final.

Reginald accepted his defeat. "Where shall I tell the man to drive?" he asked.

For a moment she hesitated, with an odd look of doubt, which Reginald found himself resenting. Then she said: "Perhaps I shall not drive all the way; it may be better not. Tell him to go first to Farringdon Road."

"And you will not forget your promise?"

"To ask you for help? No—I shall not forget it. Perhaps I shall come quite soon—when I have talked with my brother."

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With that the cab was gone, and Reginald Drinkwater tried hard to realize, as he went home across King's Bench Walk in the dark, the visible fact that here indeed was romance and adventure after all, in workaday London, and himself in the midst of it.

II

ON the next morning after the visit of the wonderful Portuguese, Reginald, his breakfast finished, took his daily morning stroll in Fleet Street. He did this partly out of respect for Fleet Street, and a feeling that he was in some vague way growing literary in its precincts, but chiefly because for an hour after breakfast Mrs. Churcher, the laundress, made his rooms unendurable with pails and brooms, and a constant perambulation of her unclean self, which was in theory presumed to result in an accession of cleanliness to the premises. He returned perhaps a trifle later than usual, but found Mrs. Churcher still in possession—waiting for him, in fact, at the door.

"There's bin a young lady 'ere for to see you, sir," she announced, in that voice of greasy huskiness by which the Temple laundress is distinguished from the rest of her sex. "A foring young lady as give the name of Silver, or de

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Silver. She wouldn't wait, but she said p'r'aps she'd call agin, sir."

"Did she say anything else?"

"No, sir; she didn't leave no other message."

Reginald was angry with himself for his delay in Fleet Street, and questioned further. The young lady had been gone, now, some twenty minutes or half an hour. No, she hadn't said anything in particular, beyond asking for him, and bringing in with her Mrs. Churcher's bunch of keys, which she had supposed to be Mr. Drinkwater's, left in the outer door by accident.

Reginald had his lunch sent in, and kept within doors for the rest of the day; but he saw nothing of Lucia da Silva. After breakfast next morning he perceived, with uncommon serenity, that the weather was damp and foggy, and afforded some sort of excuse for hanging about in his rooms, or at farthest on the stairs and lobby, while Mrs. Churcher performed her daily rites. But he waited and watched in vain till Mrs. Churcher had been gone out an hour, and more.

Then at last there was a timid tap at his door, which he opened instantly, to see Lucia before him.

"I have come," she said, "only because I have made you a promise. Do you remember the promise?"

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"Indeed I do—that you would tell me if I could be in any way of service to you and your brother. Tell me, now, what I can do."

"I think, perhaps, you might not like it."

"If it will serve you—and your brother—I shall delight in it. I will do anything. What is it?"

"They have discovered our lodgings—the men."

"The men who were watching you?"

"Yes. How I do not know. Perhaps they followed the cab—perhaps some other way; who can tell? They have found us out again, and we must go; but they are watching us, and it is difficult."

"Where will you go?"

"That is for my brother to settle; but I think he has plans, if—if we have a friend—a devoted, noble friend who will help us. Will you be the noble friend?"

"Of course—I have promised. I will do anything. What is the plan?"

"I will say what my brother thinks. We have been going out, my brother and I, every evening, in a cab, to dinner at a restaurant. Will you come with me to-night, instead of my brother?"

Could there be a pleasanter deed of heroism? Reginald heard the proposal with perhaps as much relief as surprise, for this was an act of

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devotion that he was quite ready to perform every day of his life. "It will give me the greatest pleasure," he said. "Where shall I come for you?"

"This is where we are staying," she replied, and handed him a card. It was that of a house—obviously a boarding-house—in a quiet square near the New River Head; a place that Reginald remembered to have seen in his wanderings in London, and to have noticed because of its contrast of character with the neighboring streets.

"You must not come to the front door," she resumed, "as you will understand when I explain. There is a path behind the houses, with stables. Each house has a door in the garden wall, and you must come to the fourth, where I shall be waiting before six o'clock; let us say half-past five."

"That will be early for dinner, won't it?"

"Oh, we need not go to dinner at once. Often my brother and I go out early. The house on the north side of the square, remember. Will you come? I must not wait here—my brother is expecting me. You *will* come?"

Nothing should stop him, Reginald resolved, that left him with legs to stand on; and he said so, in more elegant terms. And even as he was gathering his wits to frame certain inquiries that should not seem to pry, she was gone, with a

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press of the hand and a glance from her black eyes that kept him vastly elated for ten minutes; at the end of which period it dawned on him, as it might have done before, that it must be intended that he should assume the character of Lucia's brother for the evening, together with the liabilities of that relationship, including any casual bullet that his enemies might consider a suitable token of their sentiments. With that his elation sensibly diminished, and it occurred to him that it was much pleasanter to listen to Lucia's praises of his magnanimity than to do anything to deserve them.

Still, it was an adventure, and he was in for it beyond withdrawal; moreover, the danger somehow did not affect him as very immediate. The design appeared fairly clear. He was to enter the house from the back unobserved, and to leave it from the front, so as to draw off the attention of the watchers. Then, while the house was free from their observation, Luiz da Silva would make his escape and find some other retreat. "You must not come to the front door," Lucia had said, "as you will understand when I explain." But she had explained nothing as yet, and no doubt meant to reserve explanations till his arrival; though the plan seemed clear enough.

On the whole he decided that he must dress for dinner. He could not tell whether or not

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Luiz da Silva had brought a dress-suit with him, that being one of the things he had meant to ask; but it could make little difference, either way. So dress he did.

The fog thickened during the day, and it was dark some time before the hour fixed. Reginald left his cab a street or two away, and walked the remaining distance. The square was not difficult to find, nor the pathway behind the garden wall; and as he reached the fourth of the doors it opened while his hand was raised to tap, and he could see Lucia's dim figure within.

"Hush!" she said, "do not speak now. It is *most* noble of you."

She took his arm, led him in and quietly closed and fastened the door. The garden was a small enough space, but they traversed it slowly as well as noiselessly; and Reginald began to feel that this was something more like an adventure than any previous experience of his life. They climbed a short flight of stone steps, and entered the house by a door which stood ajar; and then she spoke again.

"There is a cab waiting," she said. "Will you turn up your coat-collar? If you will do that, and pull your hat a little forward, you will look much like my brother."

He did as he was bid, and they emerged into the dim light of the hall, with its feeble gas-jet.

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He could now see that Lucia was already prepared, with hat and cloak. She opened the front door.

"I think they are at the corner of the square, to the left," she whispered. "Do not look in that direction, but come straight into the cab. We go to the Café Royal."

The door shut softly behind them, and Reginald, his eyes fixed rigidly on the cab, valiantly resisted a desperate impulse to plunge into it headlong, and descended the steps with nervous deliberation. Truly this was an adventure at last.

He experienced a feeling of much relief when they were safely seated in the cab and bowling through the streets toward Bloomsbury; but he got little conversation from his companion, who seemed nervous and thoughtful. He ventured to doubt the possibility that they were being followed; but she assured him that she and her brother had been followed on just such an occasion on the previous evening, a little later, and surmised that the enemy must keep a cab within call. And to a suggestion that an arrival at the Café Royal at six o'clock would be a little awkward she replied that there was a very particular reason for it, which her brother would explain in detail when he had the happiness of personally meeting Mr. Drinkwater, to whom he would be eternally grateful.

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Through Hart Street they turned into New Oxford Street, and so down Shaftesbury Avenue. As they neared Picadilly Circus she spoke again. "If you will pay the man through the roof-door," she said, "we shall not have to stand long when we alight."

Reginald admired the mental alertness that could suggest this expedient to a foreigner in London, and complied with the suggestion; so that when the cab pulled up before the Café Royal they lost no time in reaching the swing-doors. Reginald saw, with some apprehension, that another cab stopped a little way behind them though after all with so many other cabs about it might not be worth considering.

The doors swung behind them, and Reginald felt a further accession of confidence. What an adventure!

But here he encountered surprise and disappointment. For Lucia turned to him and said hurriedly: "Oh, Mr. Drinkwater, I can never repay you! How brave you are! I have been in terrible fear for you all the way. Perhaps I ought not to have brought you, but there was no other friend for my dear brother—the brother I love so well! Will you promise to stay here, and not show yourself outside till after dinner? Till nine o'clock?"

"Certainly—we must wait before dinner—we—we——"

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"Thank you, oh, thank you!" she interrupted, seizing his hand. "I must leave you now—I must go at once to my brother. There is a side door here, I know, into a little dark street; I shall not be seen. I will see you, or write to you, very soon. Good-bye, my noble friend!"

And with that she was gone, leaving Reginald dumb and blinking. So he stood till it occurred to him that he was attracting notice; which, indeed he was. Whereupon he stalked gloomily across the room and flung himself into a seat; and being impelled to do something desperate, he ordered absinthe, which he did not like, but which was the most desperate form of refreshment he could think of.

He sat alone and glowered and smoked cigarettes for an hour and a half; a period of time which sufficed to relieve his disappointment, and arouse his interest in the very excellent dinner which was to follow. And the excellent dinner reconciled him to his circumstances so far that he began to congratulate himself on having very cleverly foiled a very desperate gang of conspirators. He fell to wondering when and how he should next hear of Lucia da Silva; and so, a little past nine o'clock, he made his way home on foot, rather better satisfied with himself, on the whole, that he had felt after any other dinner he could remember. For he had an idea

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that he had acquitted himself very well; and, indeed, it was a very jewel of an adventure.

Once more next morning he endured the society of Mrs. Churcher after breakfast—the fog was even heavier, to-day—but there was no caller. None, indeed, till the afternoon, and then it was a messenger-boy, with a letter; a letter written on scented paper in violet ink, but scribbled so hurriedly that it was often difficult to separate words and sentences. This done, however, it read thus:

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My brother and I cannot thank you enough for your generous kindness last night, which, alas, did not avail so effectually as we had hoped. The watching enemy were, as you know, two, and it would seem that only one followed us, leaving the other, the small, short man, to watch and confront my brother. This led to something which has altered our plans and makes us ask you for one favor more. Will you do it? Do not refuse after such kindness as you have shown. Will you go with a cab this evening at about six to the house we have left and bring away a large box? Enclosed is a note for the landlady, who will give you the box, and will hand you a hasty note of instructions I have left. Do not stay to read that note till you are in the cab and safely away with the box, and do not let the cab stand at

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the house longer than you can help. Also do not mention our real name to the landlady—you will understand that we have been obliged to conceal it. This time you will go to the front door, of course. Send me a note by this messenger saying that you will do this without fail.

Ever yours gratefully and hopefully,

LUCIA

Here was more food for Reginald's romantic appetite, which was by no means sated yet, but rather sharpened by experience. He longed to learn what had happened as the result of the encounter of Luiz and his enemy, and how the plot stood now. So he sent by the messenger a hurried note that he would certainly and gladly do all that was asked of him, and addressed himself to preparations. Such an adventure!

III

IT was within a very few minutes of six that Reginald's cab—this time a four-wheeler, because the box might be large—brought him once more to the house in Pentonville. There was some little difficulty in finding it, for the fog had been thickening all day. This he judged an advantage as regarded the removal of the box—a thing no doubt that would be better done unobserved.

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His knock brought to the door a very common-place general servant, who took the note, and presently returned with another, addressed in Lucia's handwriting, to himself. Then she led him into a side room and shortly indicated the box by a jerk of the hand and a suggestion that he would find it "pretty heavy."

It was a larger box than he had expected, long and unwieldy, and more than he could carry by himself. So he called the cabman, and they found it no very easy carrying, together; the cabman, in fact, growling furiously.

The box safely mounted on the roof, Reginald lost no time in entering the cab, giving the cabman the first direction for Farringdon Road, that being the nearest main road he could think of at the moment. After an excruciating delay—the cabman was exasperatingly deliberate with his rug—they moved off, and Reginald pulled out his note of instructions. It was even more hurriedly scribbled, he noticed, than the letter he had received by the messenger-boy a few hours before, the words running on with scarcely a lift of the pen, and no punctuation at all. The streets were dark as well as foggy, and he could only catch a glimpse on the paper now and again as they passed a shop or an uncommonly bright street-lamp, and one or two of the more legible words started out and vanished again. "Waterloo Station" was clear, near the bottom, and

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higher up "trouble," "difficulty," and "remains." At this last word Reginald sat up with an awful shock. Remains? What was in that heavy box on the roof?

At this moment the cab emerged into a street so full of lighted shops that the whole note became plain; separating words and sentences with some difficulty, this is what he read:

"Sorry to trouble, but difficulty with small man caused. Troublesome thing. We must remove remains in box. Trust you implicitly. Bring to York Road gate of Waterloo Station 6.30."

What words can paint the consternation of Reginald Drinkwater as he read this note? "We must remove remains in box!" This, then, was the event that had altered their plans and caused them "to ask one favor more." The encounter in the fog between Luiz da Silva and his enemy had ended in the death of the small man, and here was he, Reginald Drinkwater, carrying the corpse across London in a cab!

The callousness of the note, too! The "difficulty" with the small man had caused the trouble, and it—or he—was merely a "troublesome thing!" A truly Southern contempt of human life!

As he sat, amazed and confounded, the cab

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pulled up in Farringdon Road, and the driver, with growls from the box, invited further instructions.

The interruption recalled Reginald to action. "The York Road gate of Waterloo Station," he said, "as quick as you can get there!"

For, indeed, this was all he could do. They trusted him; he had accepted the trust and had given his word, though he had never guessed what it involved. And after all, he reflected, this was a different thing, far from murder; nothing but simple self-defence. Though that consideration somehow made very little difference to the horror of the long box on the roof and what it held.

The cab crawled and thumped and clattered through the fog, and Reginald prayed for the fog to thicken and so hide the ghastly box from human sight. And thicken it did, so that after a martyrdom of stopping and starting and crawling through Farringdon Road and Street, the vehicle emerged from Ludgate Circus to encounter an increasing blackness in New Bridge Street. On it crept, close by the curb, and presently was lost in an immensity of mist, wherein nothing could be seen but nebulous light in distant random spots. They were making across the end of Queen Victoria Street for Blackfriars Bridge.

The voyage across this smoky ocean seemed to

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be the longest stretch of the interminable journey. Once or twice the lights of some other vehicle neared and faded again, and shouts came from invisible depths; but the traffic hereabout was sparse just now. Reginald had begun to consider the possibility that the cab was making circles among the multitudinous crossings of these regions, when suddenly the horse stumbled and fell in a heap.

The cabman made one roll of it out of his rug and off the box, and was dimly visible hauling at his horse's head and clearly audible cursing its entire body. The horse, for its own part, seemed disposed to approve of the situation, and willingly to accept the opportunity for a prolonged rest. Blows and shouts, it would seem to reflect, were much the same, lying or standing, and lying was the easier posture.

Reginald's terrors increased tenfold; there would be a crowd, and a policeman, and the long box would be hauled down under general observation; and in his disordered memory the thing seemed now to have looked so like a stumpy coffin that he wondered he had not suspected it at once. He must, at any rate, keep it from the eye of a policeman.

He scrambled out, and addressed the cabman. "If your horse is long getting up," he said, "I'll have another cab. I'm in a hurry."

"All right," replied the cabman, extending his

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palm. "I've 'ad enough of it, if you 'ave. 'E ain't a easy one to get up, once 'e's down, an' I b'lieve 'is knees is cut. Gimme my fare."

Reginald hastily produced half a crown, and stood as firmly as he could while the man shoved the horrible box into his arms, and then slung his end on the neighboring curb. Having done which the cabman turned his attention once more to his horse, leaving his late fare to wrestle his luggage across the pavement; for Reginald's immediate purpose was to elude the eye of the policeman who must inevitably arrive to inspect the recumbent horse.

Plainly the cab had strayed in the wide space before Blackfriars Bridge, and wandered diagonally across the approach; for now Reginald perceived that he had landed on the footpath of the Victoria Embankment. He pushed the box, end over end, into the darkest available spot under the parapet, and peered out into the choking fog in search of another cab.

But very soon he began to understand that he was attempting something near an impossibility. A passing light in the wide, dark road was the most that could be seen of any cab, and each dash from the curb which he made only revealed that the cab was engaged. He began to grow seriously alarmed. He could not carry the thing—indeed he began to experience a growing repugnance to touch it or go near it—and there

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seemed to be positively no means of getting it to Waterloo. Moreover, the time appointed was already long overpast, and it was near seven.

As he stood so, distractedly staring at the lights in the fog, a slow footstep approached, and a tall policeman came suddenly upon him out of the gloom, looking into his face as he passed—looking, as it seemed to Reginald's uneasy perceptions, with an eye of inquiry and deep suspicion. Fortunately, the man saw nothing of the box lying close under the parapet, and vanished as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving Reginald in an agony of fear. What if the policeman had seen the box, and had asked questions? How account for his possession of the corpse of an unknown foreigner? Plainly something must be done, and at once.

His first impulse, as soon as the policeman was gone, was to take to his heels, simply. But then he remembered the river, so close to hand. The plain object of Lucia and her brother must be to dispose of the body, somehow; and possibly by this time they had fled, alarmed at his non-arrival. In any case there was no visible means of bringing them the box, and he must act on his own account, before that policeman returned on his beat. He took one stealthy glance about him, raised an end of the box against the parapet, and with a great effort lifted the other end and pushed the thing forward till it balanced on the

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coping. Then with a final desperate shove he sent it tumbling into the black abyss before him, and ran his hardest.

He soon found it needful to check his pace, however, and narrowly averted a collision with a tree as it was. He found that he had taken the direction along the Embankment, away from Blackfriars. That being so he must go over Waterloo Bridge to inform Lucia of the fate of the box, if she were still there. As he went he grew calmer, and presently saw, by aid of a lamp, that it was five minutes past seven. He crossed the road warily at the best-lighted place he could find, and made his best pace to keep his appointment.

That dreary tramp seemed a week of groping hours, and he found himself doubting his watch when it indicated, in the light of the public-house at the corner of York Road, that he was little more than an hour late. He hastened on, and was barely emerging from the blackness beneath the railway-bridge when his arm was seized above the elbow, and Lucia stood before him.

"Where is it? The box?" she demanded.

"It's all right—I've—I've got rid of it; I—"

"Got rid of it? What d'you mean?" Surprise, alarm, and sharp suspicion were harsh in her voice.

"Pitched it into the river. That was all I could do, you see, with——"

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"Pitched it into the river?" Her voice rose to a sort of hushed scream.

"Yes. The cab broke down, and I had to get rid of the corpse somehow, and so—and so—"

"Corpse? What corpse?"

"In the box—the short man; the remains. It had to be got rid——"

She snatched at his arm again and shook it. "Do you mean to tell me," she hissed in his face, "that you've thrown that box into the river?"

"Yes, certainly!"

What followed Reginald will always find it difficult to describe, even if he should ever wish to remember it, which is doubtful. He was aware of a sudden torrent of a language which he was sure was not Portuguese, since he had heard it frequently at the Islington Cattle Market. Then something hard of Lucia's—he could scarcely believe it was her fist—took him suddenly on the left ear, and the lady herself, her skirts snatched up in her hands, vanished into the fog at a bolt, leaving him dumb and gasping, as well as a little deaf—on the left side.

IV

THAT evening in his rooms, amazed and bewildered, Reginald Drinkwater pulled once again from his pocket the note of instructions he

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had received at Pentonville. The thing was most hastily scribbled, as though it were all one sentence; most of the words ran on without a break till they reached the end of the line, and yet the meaning seemed quite clear. The punctuation he had supplied himself, and now he could see no better arrangement. "We must remove remains in box." That was plain enough; certainly plain enough. And then, suddenly, as by a flash of inspiration, he saw the thing in quite a different reading. The word "caused" ended the first line, and "troublesome thing" began the second. But hereabout the words were all joined, and if only the "some" were tacked on to "thing" instead of "trouble"—and there was no reason why it should not be—the whole meaning was changed. "Difficulty with small man caused trouble," it would read, and then, "something we must remove remains in box." Something we must remove remains in box!

Mouth and eyes and fingers all opened together, and the paper fell between his knees as this amazing explanation presented itself. Then there was no body! No one was killed! He had only been sent to Pentonville because "something we must remove remains in box"! Great heavens! what had he flung into the river?

He picked the paper up and read it once more, and the new reading stared at him plainer than

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ever. What had he done? He could understand now, dimly, that Lucia probably had reasons for her amazement and anger. But then that language—worse, that punch! What did it all mean?

He gasped and wondered for two days, and then Buss, K.C., returned from his little holiday. Reginald's attention was attracted to his neighbor by a sudden howl and a series of appalling bellows, accompanied by frantic rushings to and fro, bangings of doors and shoutings on stairs. Then, after an interval, Reginald, still curious, perceived the head of an inspector of police at the nearest open window of Buss, K.C. And after another interval that same inspector presented himself at the rooms of Mr. Reginald Drinkwater. Mr. Buss's rooms had been entered and robbed during his absence from town, and the entry had been effected, in the judgment of the police, through the window in the corner, by some person crossing from Mr. Drinkwater's window. Of course the inspector didn't wish to say or do anything unpleasant, and no doubt investigations would put things in a different light; but for the present——!

And so it came about that the Drinkwater romance was first poured into the unenthusiastic ears of the police; and that some of the most valuable of the Buss silver was dragged and dived for in the Thames near Blackfriars under

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the joint direction of the police and Mr. Drinkwater himself.

"Yes," observed the inspector, some days after his first visit, when Mr. Drinkwater's *bona fides* had been quite established—"yes, sir, it's just their sort o' job. Lucia da Silva she called herself this time, did she? It's a very pretty name. She's had a lot of 'em at one time or another, but I never heard that before. She's been Spanish an' she's been Italian an' she's been Greek—this Portuguese dodge is fresh; nothing like being up-to-date, I suppose. Bit of a sheeny, really, I believe. Yes. It's *she's* the smart one; he's got ideas, but he funks the work. You see she did it all in this job. Came to try and fit keys to your door when you were out—that was when you surprised her. Her fright was real enough, of course, when you turned up, but she was smart enough to turn it to her own account. You see, Mr. Buss's doors would be a harder job than yours—he's had patent locks put on 'em, inside and out, an' no doubt they knew it.

"Wonderful quick she was with her yarn, wasn't she? She's a topper. Knew how to adapt it, too, you see. It was when she got you safe off in the Café Royal they did it. Did it together, with the keys they'd made from the waxes she got from your laundress's bunch when she came the day before, and you were out. These women shouldn't leave keys about like

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that, though they always do. Yes, she did it smart all through—I always admired that gal. Not least smart was getting *you* to bring the stuff along after they'd left their lodgings. I think I know why that was. It was him funking it again—he's always a funk, fortunately, in these jobs. Thought we'd got an eye on the house, which we hadn't, because it's quite a respectable place, and we'd lost sight of him lately. But see the neatness of it, getting *you* to carry the stuff. If we *had* been watching the house, or if you'd been stopped on the way, *you'd* have been in the soup, not them. Found with the goods on you, you see, sir, and the burglary done from your rooms! Eh? Oh, very neat. But there—I've got one joke against her, when I find her; that note that queered the game. That *is* rich. 'Remains,' eh? 'Remains in box!' We must explain that to her, when we get her! 'Remains,' eh? Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" repeated Reginald—a sickly echo.
"Yes, quite a joke—against her!"

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